OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro* GAMER™

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ATARI ST
YOUR UNMISSABLE GUIDE TO THE 16-BIT COMPUTER'S MOST INTERESTING GAMES

SALAMANDER

25 YEARS ON, PETER BARON REVISITS HIS EPIC C64 CONVERSION



CINEMAWARE SPECIAL
GETTING GAMING INSPIRATION FROM THE SILVER SCREEN

ALSO INSIDE
- KILLER INSTINCT
- DELUXE GALAGA
- GARRY KITCHEN
- TEMPEST 2000
- COMIX ZONE
- STONKERS
- VIGILANTE

21 BUDGET GAMES
THE CLASSIC 8-BIT GAMES THAT YOU'D BREAK INTO YOUR PIGGYBANK FOR

25 GAMING UNDERDOGS
WE CELEBRATE THE ANTICS OF ALEX KIDD AND OTHERS WHO HAVE FALLEN ON HARD TIMES

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ISSUE 123

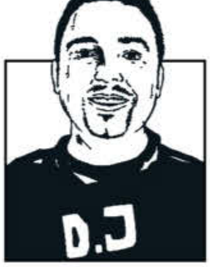


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THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE VIDEOGAME UNDERDOG



DARRAN JONES

I'm going for Bubsy The Bobcat. Sure, his games weren't amazing, but the character was fun, reminding me of a cross between Tom and the Tasmanian Devil.

Expertise:
Juggling a beautiful wife, two gorgeous girls and an award-winning magazine

Currently playing:
Michael Jackson's Moonwalker

Favourite game of all time:
Strider



PAUL DRURY

The unarmed warrior in *Aztec Challenge*. He has to avoid spears to the head, ravenous piranhas, collapsing pyramids and giant scorpions, wearing nothing but a loincloth. Brutal.

Expertise:
Easing Minter-Theurer relations

Currently playing:
Rain

Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



STUART HUNT

It has to be Alex Kidd for me. *Miracle World* was one of the first console games I owned and Alex was a cool character with plenty of potential. Shame Sega didn't use him better.

Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them

Currently playing:
Assassin's Creed IV

Favourite game of all time:
Assassin's Creed IV



JASON KELK

The greatest underdogs are those brave but mostly nameless lone pilots who take on huge armadas of aliens in shoot-'em-ups.

Expertise:
Being a homebrew hero

Currently playing:
Crystal Quest

Favourite game of all time:
IO



IAIN LEE

I feel sorry for all of them in *Left 4 Dead*. Seriously, what hope do they have of a sustainable future? It's pretty bleak…

Expertise:
Pretending to be an American on Xbox Live

Currently playing:
Grand Theft Auto V

Favourite game of all time:
Elite (the BBC Model B version)



RICHARD BURTON

Technician Ted – a working class hero in a rubbish job in a game that is virtually impossible to complete unless you're blessed with some form of superhero-like powers.

Expertise:
Stuff and nonsense

Currently playing:
Spy Hunter

Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner



MARTYN CARROLL

I anticipated that Argonaut's *Croc* series would run and run. *Croc 3, Croc 4, Croc Team Racing, Croc Soccer* etc

Expertise:
Games you could POKE

Currently playing:
Rayman Legends

Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy



ANDREW FISHER

Heels from *Head Over Heels* – the poor little underdog in that relationship, carrying all the luggage.

Expertise:
30 years of gaming

Currently playing:
Call Of Duty: Ghosts

Favourite game of all time:
Paradroid

LOADING…

Just as I was writing this editorial the PlayStation 4 came into the office. It looks lovely and it has a quirky slanted design that I find quite endearing. I'm excited about the release of PS4 and Xbox One. Not because I'll be rushing out on launch to buy one (this marks the first time since the Mega Drive that I've not done this) but because it marks an interesting stage of **Retro Gamer**'s evolution.

The Xbox, GameCube and PlayStation 2 are all two generations old now, the very definition of retro for a great many of our readers. As a result, if we can find interesting articles to write about these machines we will cover them (as seen recently with our *Wind Waker* and *Grand Theft Auto III* Making Of features). It's worth noting that this doesn't mean we're going to change the magazine overnight (the focus of each issue will be predominantly on 8 and 16-bit as it always has) but it's a nice option to have.

It's also nice to know that after nearly ten years, **Retro Gamer** is still going strong, delivering exclusive content that just can't be read anywhere else. The New Year is right around the corner and we have plenty of great things planned for the magazine. What are they? Now that would be telling…

Enjoy the magazine,

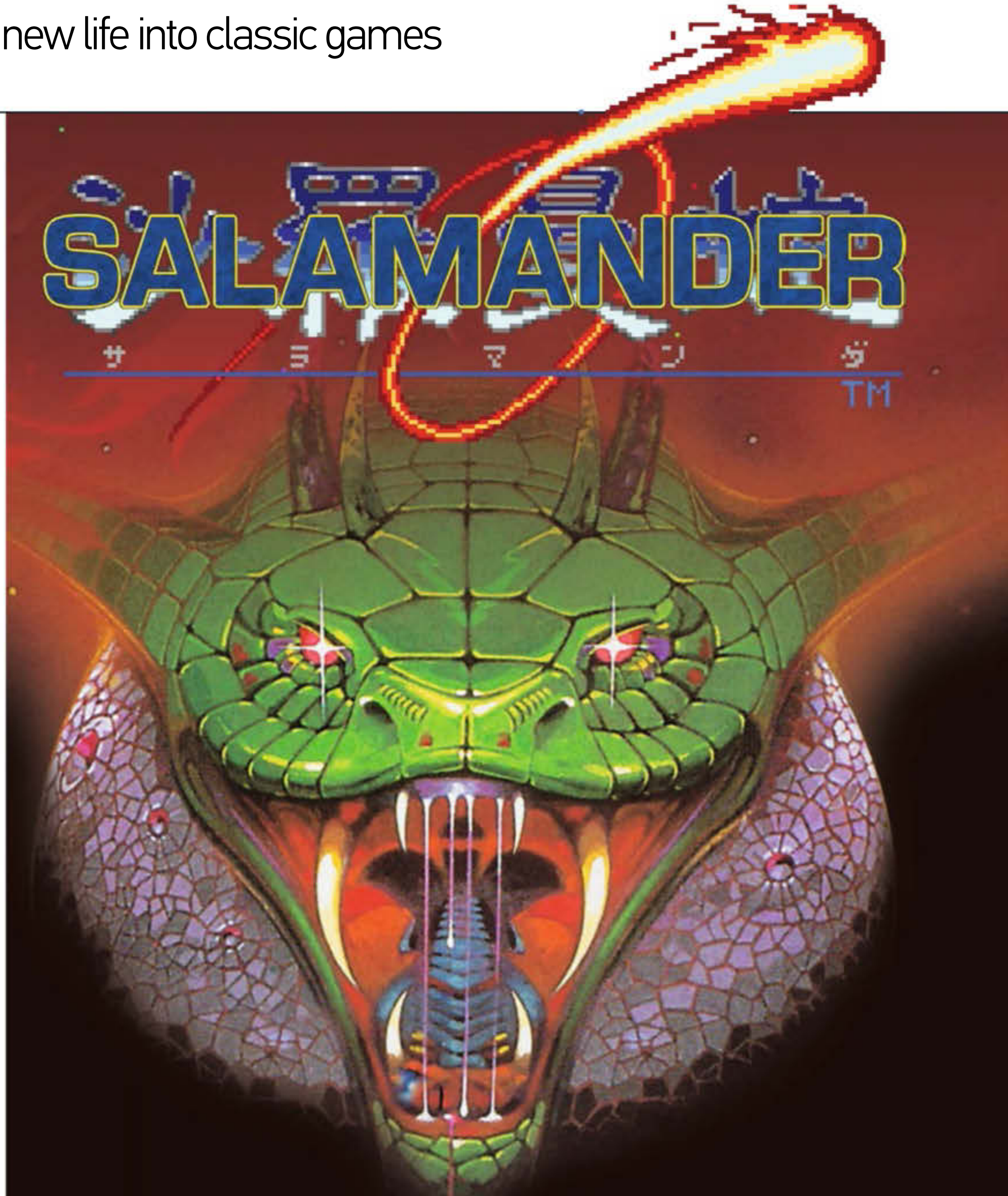


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>> Load 123 Breathing new life into classic games

FEATURED

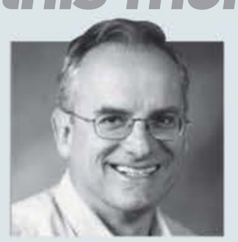




RETRO REVIVALS

In the hot seat this month...









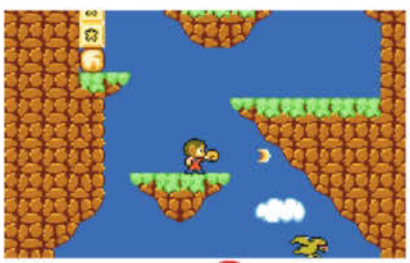
"Stands clear of the rest of Kojima's bonkers saga"

Samuel Roberts









retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL







ESSENTIALS

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retro radar

>> GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



>> This month **Retro Gamer** notes the sad passing of William Cleland Lowe, the father of PCs. We also give our verdict on this year's Play Expo and see how all the latest Kickstarters are faring

CONTENTS



» IBM had a clear vision of what a main PC user would look like when its machine was first launched.

WE PAY TRIBUTE TO THE FATHER OF PCS

WILLIAM CLELAND LOWE 1941-2013

William Cleland Lowe is not a name most people recognise, and his passing on 19 October this year probably went unnoticed by most readers of Retro Gamer. However, this unsung hero of the computing industry is responsible for one of the most dominant computing and gaming platforms in the world: the IBM-PC or PC for short. The entire market, now composed almost entirely of PC compatibles, owes its existence to the computer William oversaw the creation of – the IBM 5150.

William was born on 16 January 1941 in Easton, Pennsylvania. He went to college (Lafayette College right there in Easton) on a basketball scholarship, but graduated with a degree in physics. In the interim he had dropped the basketball scholarship because he found it too distracting. Picking up various jobs to make up the money he lost, it also showed the kind of hard-working young man he was – an ethic most likely driven by the fact that he was the first in his family to go to college.

Upon graduation, William landed a job at IBM. This was the golden era of IBM, with the founder's son Thomas J Watson Jr at the helm. Taking over in 1952, Jr had lead IBM's initiatives into computer research with the US government. The lucrative contracts allowed IBM to develop its private sector mainframe technology on the government's dime, so that by the early Sixties it had become known as the Snow White of the industry (a reference to the size of the behemoth company compared to its competitors who were referred to as the Seven Dwarves). IBM was expanding its brand everywhere and was the most admired company of the time. It even had its own songs to go with its established corporate culture ("sing men once or twice, then sing again for the ever-onward IBM!").

William's entry-level job was as a test product engineer in Endicott, NY, the birthplace of IBM and its headquarters – at least for another two years. In fact it was in two years that IBM would release the computer that would solidify its future dominance (and launch thousands of service contracts, IBM's main bread and butter earnings workhorse), the IBM 360. By the end of the decade, as IBM increased its prosperity so did William, marrying Christina and having five children (Michelle, Julie, James, Daniel and Gabriela).

Around the time a group of computer hobbyists would start their club meetings in Silicon Valley (the group, the Homebrew Computer Club, would become the launching pad for the personal computer industry in the US, comprised of what's now a literal 'who's who' of industry people), William was promoted. Heading down to Atlanta, Georgia he was named director of development and manufacturing operations for the General Systems Division (GSD). Established in 1969, the Atlanta GSD was one of two principle



» William Cleland Lowe was a tremendous asset to IBM.



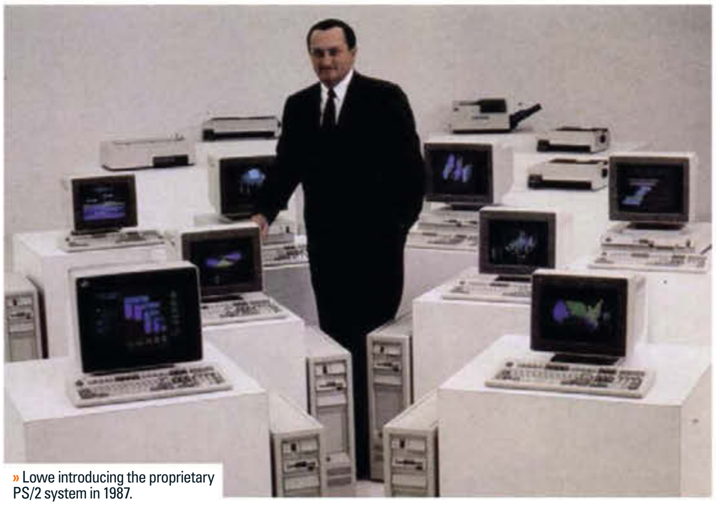
» There aren't many companies that could boast Charlie Chaplin as a mascot, but IBM could.

manufacturing and development sites for IBM's equipment. Within two years, William was moved to director of strategic development and then assistant to GSD's development.

With nowhere left to go at the Georgia GSD, William shipped off to GSD's manufacturing operations in sunny Boca Raton, Florida in 1978 where he was appointed systems manager, entry-level systems. Ten months later he was lab director for the entire operation.

It was in August 1979 that William would have the opportunity to leave his mark at IBM and his legacy to the world. IBM's management, including CEO Frank Cary, were holding an emergency meeting. It appeared a new industry centered on 'personal computers' had sprung up overnight in Silicon Valley, prompting some of the major electronics firms such as Tandy, Texas Instruments and Commodore to put their hats in the ring as well. Upstart Apple Computers was leading the whole market. IBM knew it had to get in now or risk trying to take on a market that had grown too large to dominate. This was IBM, it dominated and forced others to try and follow, not the other way around.

Cary wanted suggestions for looking outside of IBM, fearing development at IBM would take too long. William offered up the idea to put an IBM badge on computer newcomer Atari's soon-to-be-released computers. The videogame powerhouse was leaping



» Lowe introducing the proprietary PS/2 system in 1987.

into the personal computer market with a new computer to be released in several months, based around a very consumer-friendly design. And there was the possibility it could even buy Atari outright. The group of managers called it "the dumbest idea they ever heard". So, William offered up another plan: IBM should produce its own personal computer. Cary returned to his concern that any effort at IBM would take four years and 300 people to accomplish. William proposed back that they could do it in a year.

Two weeks later William gave Cary his plan. To save time they'd do everything open architecture, using as many off-the-shelf components as possible. It would be a very non-IBM computer. "The key decisions were to go with an open architecture, non-IBM technology, non-IBM software, non-IBM sales and non-IBM service. And we probably spent a full half of the presentation carrying the corporate management committee into this concept, because this was a new concept for IBM at that point," said William to noted interviewer Robert Cringley in 1995. Cary approved the plan and Project Chess was born and lead by William. The rest, as they say, is history. The IBM PC (model 5150) was released on 12 August 1981 and immediately thrust the young personal computer industry into longevity as big business took it seriously. William's partnership with Microsoft both helped IBM meet the tight deadline and ultimately would put an end to its short-lived dominance by the time PC compatibles took over the market in the late Eighties. (For more on how Microsoft helped the PC become a major gaming platform, see *The Story Of Microsoft* in **Retro Gamer** 116).

For his efforts, William was promoted several times at IBM, including to head of the Boca division and later the entry systems division at IBM. Resigning in 1988 over IBM's planned direction with the PS/2 line, he moved to Xerox and then Gulfstream Aerospace Corp as president.

His daughter Michelle recently summed up his contributions to *AP*'s Tammy Webber: "I'm so proud of him… he's touched everything. If he hadn't taken a risk and had the chutzpah he did to make it happen, it could have taken many more years before everyone had a computer on their desktop."

"I'm so proud of him… he's touched everything"

Michelle, William's daughter



» Even at this early stage PCs were targeted at children. Thank goodness games came along.

The evolution of IBM PCs

» IBM has continually honed its range of PCs over the years



IBM-PC (1981)

The PC started it all for IBM and for personal computer gaming. No, it's not related to the Van Halen album of the same name, but the 5150 became a rockstar in its own right to the business world. Introducing an open architecture backed by the name IBM, it was a departure for the company that once again marked an important product shift.



IBM-XT (1983)

The IBM XT introduced a standard still in use today – a personal computer paired with a hard drive. Hard drives for personal computers were relatively new at the time, and every XT was paired with a spacious 10Mb hard drive (enough space for about five mp3s). While others were busy swapping floppy discs or running outdated operating systems stored in ROM, IBMers were cruising the future.



IBM PC Jr (1984)

IBM tried to play catch-up with the low-end gaming computer market dominated by Commodore and Atari in the US. With a built-in RF modulator to hook directly up to a television like the competitors, a cheap chicklet keyboard that was wireless (via an infrared connection that had problems lining up) and the ability to accept cartridges, what could go wrong? Not being fully compatible with IBM's PC platform only insured this was the biggest computer flop ever.



IBM PS/2 (1987)

In response to the rising dominance of PC clone manufacturers like Compaq, IBM created the proprietary PS/2 platform. Hoping the closed platform would allow it to tighten the rains, its licensing scheme backfired and drove manufacturers and consumers further to the open platform still championed by the PC clone makers.



Wintel (1992 to present)

What can be said about the Wintel platform that hasn't been said already? Microsoft's Windows platform partnered with any "insert in the blank" clone manufacturer's computer powered by an Intel processor (the standard of the platform since the 5150) became a powerhouse in the Nineties and is still the standard computer and personal computer gaming platform to this day.

retro columns

» RETRO RECOLLECTIONS WITH CELEB IAIN LEE

Here's the bio...
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting the *2 Hour Long Late Night Radio Show* on Absolute Radio at 11pm.

Hi there, my name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro





Dear RGR (Retro Gamer Readers)

First of all, apologies for not knowing all of your names. I should do by now, and maybe that's part of the problem.

Anyway, I thought I'd write you a letter just to check in and see how you're all doing. I'm a little frustrated as my youngest son has muffed up the screen on my Mac – it's massive. I've kind of fixed it, but it's still not quite right and I can feel a headache coming on. Oh well. High-class problems.

Two days ago I got to play on the Xbox One. It was fine. I'm hoping I can blag a free one, as I would struggle to justify the expense of paying for one. I was disappointed to see it's not backwards compatible, I think that's a little naughty of Microsoft.

I also discovered that one of my colleagues at work, a fairly quiet guy, is a collector of retro games. It was a lovely moment and we both brought a meeting to a halt by realising we actually had something quite powerful in common. The six other people in the room looked on us in bemusement and then annoyance as we discussed the merits of the Vectrex and various different incarnations of the Atari. After four or five minutes of this, we quietened down and the meeting resumed. It's nice to know we share a little secret though, and I know that if I ever find myself alone with him and the conversation runs a little dry I can talk about *Chuckie Egg* or Spectrums and we will happily chat for hours and hours.

And that's what writing for you each month for the past few years has been like. I don't know you, and you don't know me beyond what you may have seen or heard on TV and radio, but we all share a strong connection. I may prefer the BBC to the Spectrum; for you it may be the SNES that is the best retro system of all, but we can have fun arguing the merits and otherwise of each. It can even get a little heated, but at the end we nearly always shake hands and smile. Some take things a little more personally, and I hope they can find peace around that.

This will be my last column. I shan't be writing for **Retro Gamer** on a regular basis anymore. I may submit the odd article now and then, but it's unlikely. It's entirely my decision by the way. I just ran out of things to say and felt I wasn't giving you as good as you deserved. And you are special people. You deserve a lot of happiness.

Hey, if you ever run into me on the bus or in a café, do come over and say 'hello' and we can talk for a few minutes about games. I will always enjoy that.

Thanks to all of you who read my columns, emailed me and even slagged me off on forums – I'm proud I managed to move you.

Take care,

Iain Lee

PS – The VIC-20 is a piece of shit.


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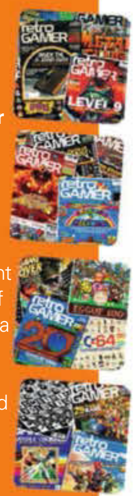
the wall

» EVERYTHING THAT'S BEEN HAPPENING IN THE WORLD OF RETRO THIS MONTH



» For any younger readers, this is the actual size of the original Game Boy

RETRO GAMER COASTERS OUT NOW



Fans of Retro Gamer will love our excellent coasters. Available in packs of four, they feature some of our best covers from the past 100 issues and are the perfect accompaniment to our excellent **Retro Gamer** mugs. A pack of four costs just £4.99, so order a set from **www.imagineshop.co.uk** today. You can get an additional 10% off coasters and all other Imagine products by quoting **FESTIVE10.** Valid until Christmas Eve.

LET'S PLAY

RETRO GAMER GIVES ITS VERDICT ON THIS YEAR'S PLAY EXPO EVENT

The Play Expo is set to return next year following a successful second outing in Manchester. It had a two-day stint at EventCity in October where it appeared to get over many of the teething problems – not least the lengthy queues – which marred the previous year's debut and that has given the organisers enough incentive to come back.

Next year's event will again take place in October, with a smaller sister expo called Replay being staged at the Norbreck Castle Exhibition Centre in Blackpool on 3 and 4 May. Those dates had clashed with the rival Retro Revival event and caused a furore on forums and social media, but Revival has since moved to 9 and 10 August at Dunstall Park in Wolverhampton.

This year's Play Expo had a large welcome emphasis on retro. The sights and sounds of the Eighties and early Nineties hit visitors in a blistering and most overwhelming manner with the retro section positioned towards the front of the venue, assaulting the senses with 102 arcade machines. Visitors could enjoy *Donkey Kong*, *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* and *Chase HQ*, among many other classics.

It also had many traders selling old games and hardware. Some stalls were certainly overpriced, but there was a great range of content on offer. Away from the hustle of the retro area, gamers could play previews of the latest games and hardware in an space called now.play, take part in casual and competitive tournaments in pro.play and see some fun, sexy and frightening costumes in cos.play.





» There was another update on *From Bedrooms To Billions*. It's due for release early next year.

There were some solid tournaments to participate in thanks to RetroCollect, while there were discussions with Andrew Hewson and an update on the exciting *Bedroom To Billions* project. It was a little sad to see so many home computers sitting idle in favour of the staggering range of computers, and the arcade section was a little too cramped for our liking, but it was a solid improvement on last year's effort. "It's a learning process," says co-organiser Gordon Sinclair about the evolution of the show. "We're always looking to improve and we put our heart and soul into the event." We look forward to next year.



» The console section of the event was far more packed than the home computer area.

PAC-MAN GETS TV SHOW

Namco's timeless videogame star is soon to feature in his own TV show. *Pac-Man And The Ghostly Adventures* has already made its appearance in the United States, but it will be debuting in Europe early next year. The show sees Pac-Man and his friends face off against Blinky, Inky, Pinky and Clyde, but also introduces a host of new enemies, ranging from the mad scientist Dr Buttocks, to evil ghostly overlord Betrayus. Presented in stereoscopic 3D, the show has proven popular enough to secure a second season, showing Pac-Man's popularity knows no bounds.



DEUS EX: UNIVERSE



Deus Ex: Universe is on its way. Eidos Montreal confirmed the project is in development for the PC and next-gen. Studio head David Anfossi said the concept was "to create an ongoing expanding and connected fame world built across a generation of core games." As part of that, Universe will be games and apps for tablets and smartphones as well as books and graphic novels, which sounds like one big cash cow to us. The team behind *Deux Ex: Revolution* is working on the game, with Anfossi saying he wanted its knowledge to continue the franchise.

MOST EXCITED ABOUT

SUPER SMASH BROS



Nintendo continues to trickle out information about this excellent looking brawler. It's still months away, but it's looking better and better.

EVERDRIVE RELEASED

Just as we went to press, Funstock announced a range of Everdrive retro games cartridges that work with original console hardware. The unofficial product allows you to make back-ups of your gaming collection to be stored on a flash drive. Everdrives are also useful, as they enable you to play Japanese games that never received an English translation on your original hardware, a godsend for those that typically fiddle around with emulators when using patched ROMS. Funstock has announced models that support the NES, SNES, N64, Master System, Mega Drive, GameGear and PC Engine and they range in price from £79.99 to £149.99.



METAL GEAR SOLID V: GROUND ZEROES

Konami has unveiled the approximate release date for *Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes*. It will launch on the Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, Xbox One and PlayStation 4 next Spring at a price of £29.99. The next gen versions will be digital only but a digital version for the 360 and PS3 will cost just £19.99. *Ground Zeroes* will be a bridge for the open-world environments of *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* and it will be used to ease people into what will be a very different kind of *Metal Gear* game using Kojima Productions' new Fox Engine.



Here's my bio…
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.

Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of C&VG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years



Many Happy Returns

My present understanding of PlayStation 4 versus Xbox One is that one of them can draw three elephants, whereas the other one only two. Some people may take this more seriously than others.

With the arrival of two new consoles, memories are flooding back from every major hardware milestone I've been amazed by. Every step of the way, my friends and I dreamed about more fantastic futures and how, eventually, everybody would love games the way we did.

Well then, to quote my favourite meme: "It's Happening!"

From those bygone conversations, two ultimate scenarios would generally be on the table. There was the all-in-one entertainment system that seamlessly united games with movies, music and sport. This would prove that games were very important. Another popular scenario – inspired by the Nintendo/Sharp all-in-one tellies – would be that major corporations such as, maybe, Sony would include videogames as standard with TVs. In both cases, the trump card would be that the games would look almost lifelike. Yes, even better than *Pit Fighter*.

We're not quite there with the second option, but Xbox One is clearly the incarnation of that first vision. In its own way, Microsoft has answered a lot of gamers' prayers by doubling down on a single solution to the modern family's entire digital entertainment needs. It's much more conspicuous than we supposed 30 years ago. But, in terms of function, it is just as foretold by a bunch of lads from Rochdale!

Potential world domination by stealth, then; this is Microsoft's answer.

While there's no ignoring Sony's Trojan Horse plans with Gaikai transforming every screen into a PlayStation, for now Sony's focus is great hardware. Way back when, this would be the frame of mind we'd enter after playing *Elite* on the BBC, *Double Dragon* on the Sega Master System, *F-Zero* on Super NES, *Virtua Fighter* on Saturn, *Shenmue* on Dreamcast… you get the idea. Basically "eat my games", no apologies required. This is my console, hear me roar.

While Xbox One and PlayStation 4 appear to be absolute solutions to quite different challenges, the journey that we've travelled to get here has a common victory. See-sawing through the ages in tit-for-tat battles that still include my beloved Nintendo, computer gaming has finally – I feel – earned its rightful place in popular culture. This is it. We are here. How does it feel? That's really hard to express.

I find it hard to believe that anyone born before 1980 (I was born in '69) can see what I'm seeing now and not have a satisfying sense of, you'll excuse the pun, *resolution*. From seeing a teeny-tiny Sinclair ZX81 on my best friend's living-room floor – crinkled wires leading to the TV, with a damn impressive version of *Space Invaders* running in RF-hazy black and white – this has been my winding path.

What I'm trying to say is that… WE WON! We all did. Doesn't matter whose side you've been on, off and on over the past three decades or so. I can still hear the sound of the family BBC Micro powering up. And I continue to honour that memory when I reach for the On switch of PS4 to see the beam of light and, with a degree of boyish enthusiasm, say "Xbox: play *Forza 5*" for the first time… and I'm just gone.



5 December – 9 January

retrodiary

>> A month of retro events both past and present



9 December 2000
■ Bandai releases its Game Boy-challenging handheld console, the WonderSwan Color. Gunpei Yokoi had a hand in developing both game systems.

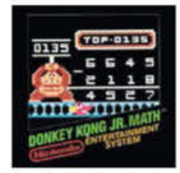


10 December 1994
■ Falling block game *Wario's Woods* is released on the NES in the US.



11 December 1998
■ *The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time* is released across Europe on the Nintendo 64.

12 December 1983
■ It was educational monkey time with *Donkey Kong Jr Math* making its worldwide debut on the NES.





14 December 2007
■ Valve Corporation's first-person-shooter *Half-Life 2* is released on PlayStation 3.



13 December 2003
■ *OutRun 2* hits the arcades and stays faithful to the original 1986 release, much to the relief of a generation of gamers.



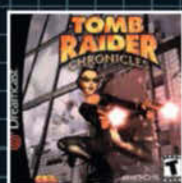
12 December 2003
■ I am the Law! *Judge Dredd: Dredd Vs Death* arrives on the GameCube.



12 December 1999
■ The highly regarded role-playing game *Planescape: Torment* is released on PC.



15 December 1995
■ Konami's classic role-playing game *Suikoden* is released on PlayStation.



15 December 2000
■ Lara Croft arrives on the Dreamcast with the release of *Tomb Raider Chronicles.*



16 December 1982
■ Nintendo's latest offering in its popular Game & Watch handheld series, *Green House*, is released.



16 December 1993
■ *Super Mario All-Stars* is released in Europe on Nintendo's SNES console. It sells rather well…



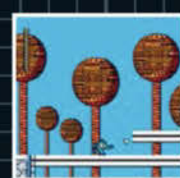
19 December 1996
■ The third instalment of the *Donkey Kong Country* series, *Dixie Kong's Double Trouble,* is released in the UK on the SNES.



19 December 1986
■ Jaleco releases a graphically different version of Ultimate's *Knight Lore* on Nintendo's Famicom Disk System.



17 December 1987
■ *Final Fantasy* by Square makes its videogame debut on Nintendo's Famicom console in Japan.



17 December 1987
■ Capcom's action platform game *Mega Man* makes his first appearance on the Famicom/NES.



20 December 1987
■ The RPG game *Phantasy Star* is released on the Sega Master System.



22 December 2010
■ *Back To The Future: The Game* is released on PC and Mac. DeLorean not included, unfortunately.



23 December 1994
■ NEC Corporation releases the 32-bit follow up console to the PC-Engine, the NEC PC-FX. It was released only in Japan and flopped badly.



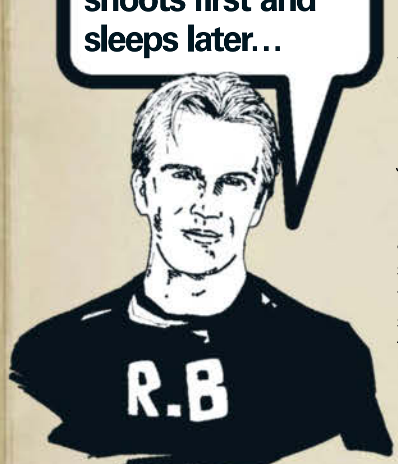
9 January 2014
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES



» Commodore's VIC-20 was pitched just right to the consumer, becoming the first home computer to sell 1 million units.

JUNE 1980 – Jack gets VIC rolling, Atari starts a thermonuclear war, Nintendo Flagman arrives, Heli Fire lacks colour and gameplay, King And Balloon floats in and Tranquilizer Gun shoots high. Richard Burton shoots first and sleeps later…



THE LATEST NEWS FROM JUNE 1980

Labelled as a "computer for the masses" by Jack Tramiel, Commodore's VIC-20 made its first appearance at the Summer Consumer Electronics Show held in Chicago.

Originally dubbed the MicroPET after its bigger, chunkier brother, the VIC-20 was intended from the outset to be the first colour home computer priced under $300, something that Mr Tramiel had demanded when Commodore executives held a strategy meeting in London two months earlier.

The end result was the VIC-1001, which would hit its price point when released in Japan. It was eventually rebranded to the more familiar VIC-20 for its American and UK releases in May and June 1981 respectively.

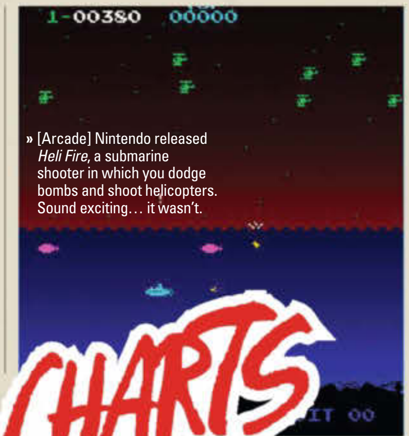
With it's full stroke keyboard, 5K RAM (3.5K free), good three-channel sound, ample room for expansion and a thriving software base it came as no surprise to find sales extremely strong. The VIC-20 sold astoundingly well and by January 1983 it had managed to sell its millionth unit worldwide.

With the Cold War and the nuclear threat still very much alive in the early Eighties, Atari released a new arcade coin-op originally called *Armageddon* but later renamed to the more familiar *Missile Command*. It was released in four different formats; upright, cocktail, cabaret and cockpit, with Atari licensing it out to Taito and Sega for the Japanese videogames market.

Missile Command was one of the first arcade games to utilise a trackball controller, ideally suited to the fast-paced manoeuvrability required for placing your crosshair in the correct spot on the screen and despatching your antiballistic missiles. The ensuing explosion lingered on screen for a few seconds, just long enough to eradicate any incoming missile threats that passed into the explosion cloud.

Your weapons were stored in three missile silos with ten warheads in each. Each silo had its own fire button and you had to be nimble of finger and quick of mind to take out the incoming nuclear missiles intent on destroying your six unnamed cities. Once a silo was hit, you lost the missiles it contained. If a city was hit, it was destroyed. If all six cities were destroyed then it was game over.

In development the cities were to be named, but with memory limitations everything that was deemed too



» [Arcade] Nintendo released *Heli Fire*, a submarine shooter in which you dodge bombs and shoot helicopters. Sound exciting… it wasn't.

CHARTS

JUNE 1980



ARCADE

1 Asteroids (Atari)
2 Space Invaders Part II (Midway)
3 Galaxian (Midway)
4 Space Invaders (Midway)
5 Monaco GP (Atari)

THIS MONTH IN...

COMPUTER AGE

The Acorn Atom was released in March 1980 but the mail-order push had just begun with adverts starting to appear. It was £120 in kit form or pre-built for £150, with Acorn's selling point being its expandability, stating, "unique in concept, its the computer that grows as you do".



SOFTSIDE

X-Wing II for the TRS-80 was featured and it stunk. It boasted of new elements to the game over the original *X-Wing*. Instead of blasting the Death Star from a distance, *X-Wing II* would let you fly down the trench and destroy it; otherwise it was the same game. Oh dear…



80 MICROCOMPUTING

Advertised was the awful *Interlude* for TRS-80 and Apple II; supposedly the most stimulating game ever. You took an interview and were then shown one of 100 interludes (role-play scenarios) ranging in sauciness to spice up your love life.



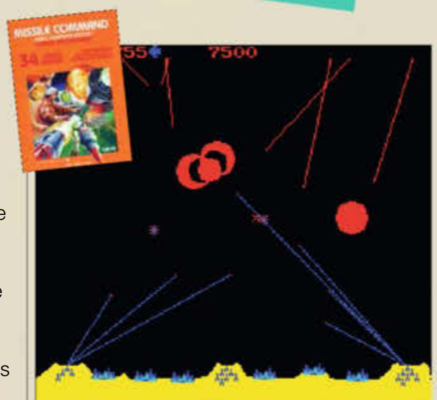
complicated or that didn't add to the game was stripped away. Other notable features removed were railroads transporting missiles from the under threat cities to the silos, as well as missile-launching submarines.

Missile Command went on to become one of the most successful and much loved coin-op games of all time. It was ported to several other formats, with the Atari 2600 version being a particularly lucrative conversion.

Nintendo released its second title in its Game & Watch handheld title on 5 June with *Flagman*. The gameplay for *Flagman* was unusual for the Game & Watch series, as the ongoing theme through the vast majority of the games was the collection, catching or dodging of objects. *Flagman* was a copying game where you were required to replicate the flag waving and shoe showing movements of the titular character. It was essentially a small pocket version of Simon but without any of the colour.

Another Nintendo game without colour, albeit added later with the aid of a colour overlay, was the arcade coin-op sea-based shooter *Heli Fire*. You controlled a submarine under heavy attack from both the sea and air. You had to shoot as many helicopters as you could while avoiding the multitude of bombs, depth charges and underwater mines being tossed your way.

Avoid the three waves of ten helicopters each level and it was



» [Arcade] *Missile Command* became a worldwide hit in arcades and did great business on the Atari 2600 too.

onto the next with the rising sea level bringing you a tad closer to your enemy.

Heli Fire wasn't a hit for Nintendo and the game faded into obscurity rather quickly with its simple gameplay and even simpler graphics. Because of this the arcade cabinets are among some of the rarest around.

A more appealing arcade shooter was *King And Balloon* developed by Namco. You control two of the king's soldiers who are armed with large orange cannons. They must keep waves of balloons at bay as they drift down attempting to abduct the King who stands below you and who must be protected. If the king is carried off three times then the games ends.

King And Balloon ran on Namco's *Galaxian* hardware and shared some sound effects with that game. However, it did boast to being the first Namco game to feature voice synthesis. Again, not a massively popular title although the game fared well enough to be converted to several home computers a few years later.

Among the not-so-memorable coin-op releases this month was *Astro Invader* by Stern Electronics, its first ever arcade release. It had been developed by Stern and Konami, with the pairing releasing it in America and Japan respectively.

The simplistic 2D shoot-'em-up was another in a long line of *Space Invaders*-styled offerings which barely registered any interest with arcade dwellers, such was its blandness.

Of a similar standard was *Space Trek* released by Sega. It was a production line clone and was dull as ditch water. A modicum of originality prevailed with Sega's other coin-op release this month, *Tranquilizer Gun*, which saw you control a big game hunter who had to gather up lions, gorillas and other wild beasties and put them in his truck with just the aid of his trusty tranquiliser gun.

It was a strangely enjoyable game, albeit not widely recognised. Equally strange was that both *Space Trek* and *Tranquilizer Gun* were designed by the same person, Steve Hanawa.

Interestingly, *Tranquilizer Gun* made a guest appearance as a hidden bonus game in the 1999 Sega Dreamcast release of *Dynamite Cop*. It unlocked once you completed all the missions in the main game.

JUNE WORLD NEWS

1 June saw the world's first 24-hour news channel begin broadcasting when the Cable News Network (CNN) went on air at 5pm. Ted Turner, the owner of Turner Broadcasting System, who owned CNN, introduced it.

16 June saw the world premiere of comedy musical action movie *The Blues Brothers* in Chicago, Illinois. Starring Dan Aykroyd and John Belushi as Elwood and Jake Blues respectively, they set out on "a mission from God" to reform their old band to raise money for the Catholic orphanage earmarked for closure. Much car crashing and some wonderful blues soaked musical moments followed.



The Blues Brothers originally started out as a musical sketch on the American comedy show *Saturday Night Live* but grew into a fully-fledged touring band, such was the calibre of the musicians involved.

23 June saw Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web, begin work on ENQUIRE. This simple hypertext program allowed the sharing of data and files between researchers which could also be updated. ENQUIRE was the forerunner of the World Wide Web, with many of its ideas taken and implemented to form the Web's beginnings.

There was an eclectic mix of albums released during June including *Live At Last* (Black Sabbath), *Emotional Rescue* (The Rolling Stones), *Cultosaurus Erectus* (Blue Oyster Cult) and the *Xanadu* soundtrack (Olivia Newton-John with The Electric Light Orchestra).



TANDY TRS-80

1 Temple Of Apshai (Automated Simulations)
2 Adventure (Microsoft)
3 Datestones Of Ryn (Automated Simulations)
4 Star Trek (Adventure International)
5 Android Nim (SoftSide)



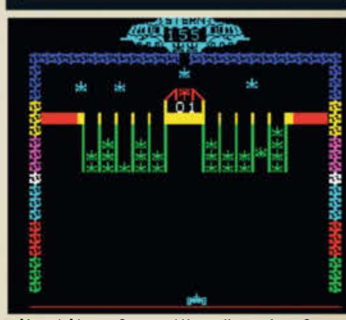
ATARI 2600

1 Superman (Atari)
2 Canyon Bomber (Atari)
3 Sky Diver (Atari)
4 Championship Soccer (Atari)
5 Circus Atari (Atari)



MUSIC

1 Theme From M*A*S*H (Suicide Is Painless)
2 No Doubt About It (Hot Chocolate)
3 Funkytown (Lipps Inc)
4 Crying (Don McLean)
5 Rat Race/Rude Boys Outa Jail (Specials)



» [Arcade] It was Stern and Konami's turn for a *Space Invaders* clone. *Astro Invaders* was mediocre at best.

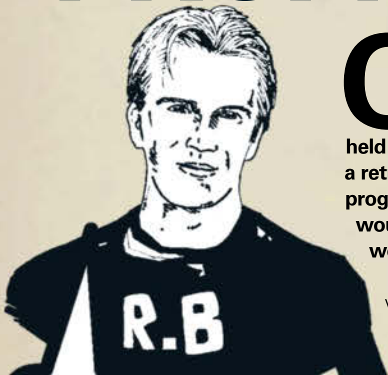
BACK TO THE NINETIES



» [Nintendo 64] *Mortal Kombat Trilogy* promised a lot, not least a complete roster of characters from the first three games.



THE LATEST NEWS FROM OCTOBER 1996



OCTOBER 1996 – Nintendo worries, id Software loses founders, Tobal No 1 Squares off with Dream Factory, Mortal Kombat Trilogy doesn't quite hit the right spot and Street Racer varies in quality. Richard Burton makes a skid mark…

One of the first UK-based retro gaming events was to begin on 21 October with the Retro Gaming Exhibition held at HMV Level One in London. With a retro gaming auction and a host of programming legends attending, it would prove to be a popular event and would run until 2 November.

Nintendo was in a state of flux with worrying reports regarding the state of the company over recent weeks. First was the news that its long awaited Nintendo 64 was suffering from sluggish sales and that Nintendo's sales forecast was overly optimistic. Nintendo also announced further prices cuts to its newest console with the N64 dropping from $249.99 to $199.99 for its North American launch last month. Japanese N64 consoles were reduced accordingly.

Nintendo suggested this was to squeeze the competition, Sony's PlayStation and Sega's Saturn, both of which had also recently launched. Others indicated that the N64 wasn't selling the units Nintendo had projected.

Potentially the most damaging news report was that long time Nintendo employee and head of its development team, Gunpei Yokoi, had left the company. Yokoi had been involved with many of Nintendo's biggest hardware and software creations. He had created the Game & Watch handheld LCD games and the Game Boy. He had also helped Shigeru Miyamoto as the producer of *Mario* and *Donkey Kong* and also produced the hugely popular *Metroid* franchise. Sadly, it seemed his one failure – the headache-inducing Virtual Boy – cost him his job.

Unfortunately for Nintendo a combination of all these elements resulted in its shares dropping sharply and being suspended from trading amid a wave of selling in its stock. However, its shares resumed trading the next day.

In another employment twist, John Romero, co-founder of id Software and developer of such first-person shooter classics as *Quake* and *Doom*, announced that he had left the company with plans to form his own games development house with Tom Hall, who was also leaving id Software. Together they would form Ion Storm on 15 November.

The timing was odd, as the PlayStation version of *Final Doom* had just hit the shops, as had *Quake* on PC, with both being very well received by gamers and reviewers alike.

It was firsts all round with the release of *Tobal No 1* on the PlayStation. Developed by Dream Factory – its first project – and published by Square with it being its first PlayStation release since its highly publicised detachment from Nintendo games development.

It also marked Square's first foray into fighting games, although a quest mode was included involving dungeon exploring with RPG elements. A weird combination, but this is Square and it worked supremely well.



» [PC] The excellent *Final Doom* on the PC was released just as id Software parted company with one of its founders, John Romero.

CHARTS

OCTOBER 1996



PLAYSTATION

1. Fade To Black (Electronic Arts)
2. International Track & Field (Konami)
3. Ridge Racer Revolution (Namco)
4. Alien Trilogy (Acclaim)
5. Atlanta Games '96 (US Gold)



PC

1. Grand Prix II (MicroProse)
2. Civilization II (MicroProse)
3. Settlers 2 (Blue Byte)
4. Championship Manager 2 (Domark)
5. BioForge Classics (Electronic Arts)



SEGA SATURN

1. Euro '96 (Sega)
2. Panzer Dragoon Zwei (Sega)
3. The Need For Speed (Electronic Arts)
4. Sega Rally (Sega)
5. Virtua Cop (Sega)



MUSIC

1. Breakfast At Tiffany's (Deep Blue Something)
2. Ready Or Not (Fugees)
3. Seven Days And One Week (BBE)
4. Escaping (Dina Carroll)
5. I Love You Always Forever (Donna Lewis)

» [Amiga] Although *Street Racer* looked great on most systems, gameplay varied, with the Amiga version the worst of the bunch.



Tobal No 1 was a splendid fighting game which was fast, intuitive and had some beautifully crafted graphics. Granted, they may not have been as detailed as others games of the genre, but dispensing with the need to texture map every last pixel within an inch of its life left *Tobal No 1* at 60 fps. Combining this with the PlayStation high-resolution mode made the game play like a dream. It was smooth, fluent and quite brilliant to play, and the introduction of a grapple move opened up the gameplay further. Unfortunately for non-Sony gamers it was only available on the PlayStation.

Almost finished and ready for release was *Mortal Kombat Trilogy* by Midway for the N64, PlayStation and Saturn consoles. It took all the characters from the first three games together with hand-picked backdrops and stages to create a celebration of head-popping *Mortal Kombat* gaming goodness. At least, that was what was hoped…

The gameplay was virtually unchanged, although the addition of an Aggressor bar, which made you faster and stronger when you filled it, was welcome. Also, a stroke of enlightenment from the developer to give you the option to turn the combo system off helped turn *Mortal Kombat Trilogy* into two games, as remembering a series of button presses to execute a combo was more akin to playing *Simon* than a fighting game. Brutalities were also included and would cause your opponent to literally explode should you pull off the 11 button combo unhampered.

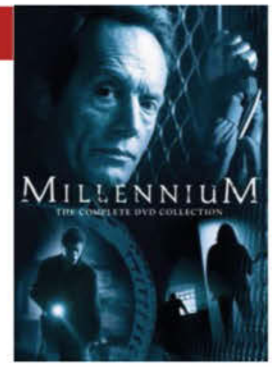
Mortal Kombat fans were spoilt for choice for characters with all the previous fighters featuring; some newly designed and many with new moves. You could also fight as one of the bosses from the games including the centaur Motaro and the tasty-with-his-fists Goro.

The PlayStation version was well received on release while the N64 version was less favourable. It lacked some of the characters and stages due to cartridge limitations and was criticised for being dull and lifeless with jerky animation in comparison to the PlayStation. The Saturn conversion was delayed and eventually materialised a year after the PlayStation release. It was essentially a copy of that version and was therefore reasonably proficient in most departments.

Street Racer was released this month for PlayStation with Amiga, Sega Saturn and Game Boy version still undergoing development. Created by Ubisoft, *Street Racer* was an attempt to recreate a *Mario Kart* style game with added violence, as players could duff each other up while burning around the track.

Sadly, the bar that was set by *Mario Kart* was way out of reach for *Street Racer*. Despite some beautifully crafted graphics the game was let down on the animation front with a sense of speed lacking in your vehicle's movement. It was a similar story with later conversions all getting less than enthusiastic reviews. Amiga *Street Racer* received particularly scathing comments with it coming up short in virtually every department. All a bit disappointing, as the earlier SNES and Mega Drive versions were both excellent.

OCTOBER WORLD NEWS



4 October saw Eddie and Alex Van Halen announce that David Lee Roth would no longer be the lead singer of Van Halen. He was replaced with Gary Cherone, former frontman of the rock band Extreme.

13 October saw actress Beryl Reid pass away aged 77. She featured in such television hits as *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier Spy* and *Smiley's People* playing the character Connie Sachs. One of her last roles was in the television series *The Secret Diary Of Adrian Mole*.

16 October saw the British Government announce plans to ban all handguns in the UK. This was in reaction to the Dunblane Massacre in March which saw Thomas Hamilton walk into a primary school and kill 16 children, their teacher and wounding many more. A gun amnesty followed for those wanting to dispose of their firearms anonymously. The plans became law in February 1997.

25 October saw *Millennium* make its television debut on the Fox Network. Conceived by Chris Carter, who also created *The X-Files*, it followed the life of Frank Black (Lance Henriksen), a law enforcement consultant for the mysterious Millennium Group who has the uncanny ability to see the world through the eyes of murderers and criminals.

Millennium lasted for three series spanning 67 episodes. Frank Black's final appearance was in a seventh-season crossover episode of *The X-Files* cunningly called *Millennium*.

October album releases included *Antichrist Superstar* (Marilyn Manson), *Republica* (Republica), *Breathe* (Midnight Oil), *Recovering The Satellites* (Counting Crows) and *A Worm's Life* (Crash Test Dummies).

THIS MONTH IN…

COMPUTER AND VIDEO GAMES

C&VG reviewers' favourite game of the month was unquestionably *Quake* for PC. The superlatives flowed with praise for its graphics and gameplay, stating "it has possibly the most incredible graphics of all time". Quite liked it then?



MEAN MACHINES SEGA

One of the reviews of the month revisited retro gaming with the release of a *Bubble Bobble* and *Rainbow Islands* compilation on the Sega Saturn. The games were both arcade-perfect and an enhanced version of *Rainbow Islands* with improved graphics and parallax scrolling was also included in the package.



NEXT GENERATION

NG ran a superb 11-page interview with Trip Hawkins. In it he believed that 32-bit was dead and everyone, including Sega and PlayStation, should give up and prepare for the 64-bit generation of consoles. He also talked about The 3DO Company and the impending release of the M2 console…





» [PlayStation] Square's first fighting game, Dream Factory's first release; *Tobal No 1* was superb.

retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL



Deluxe Galaga

ZAPPING IN THE MOONLIGHT

#69

» EDGAR M VIGDAL » AMIGA 1200 » 1995

While obviously a *Galaga* clone, according to the author Edgar M Vigdal it's more a mixture of the VIC-20 game *StarBattle* mixed with the original arcade versions of *Galaga* and *Galaxians*.

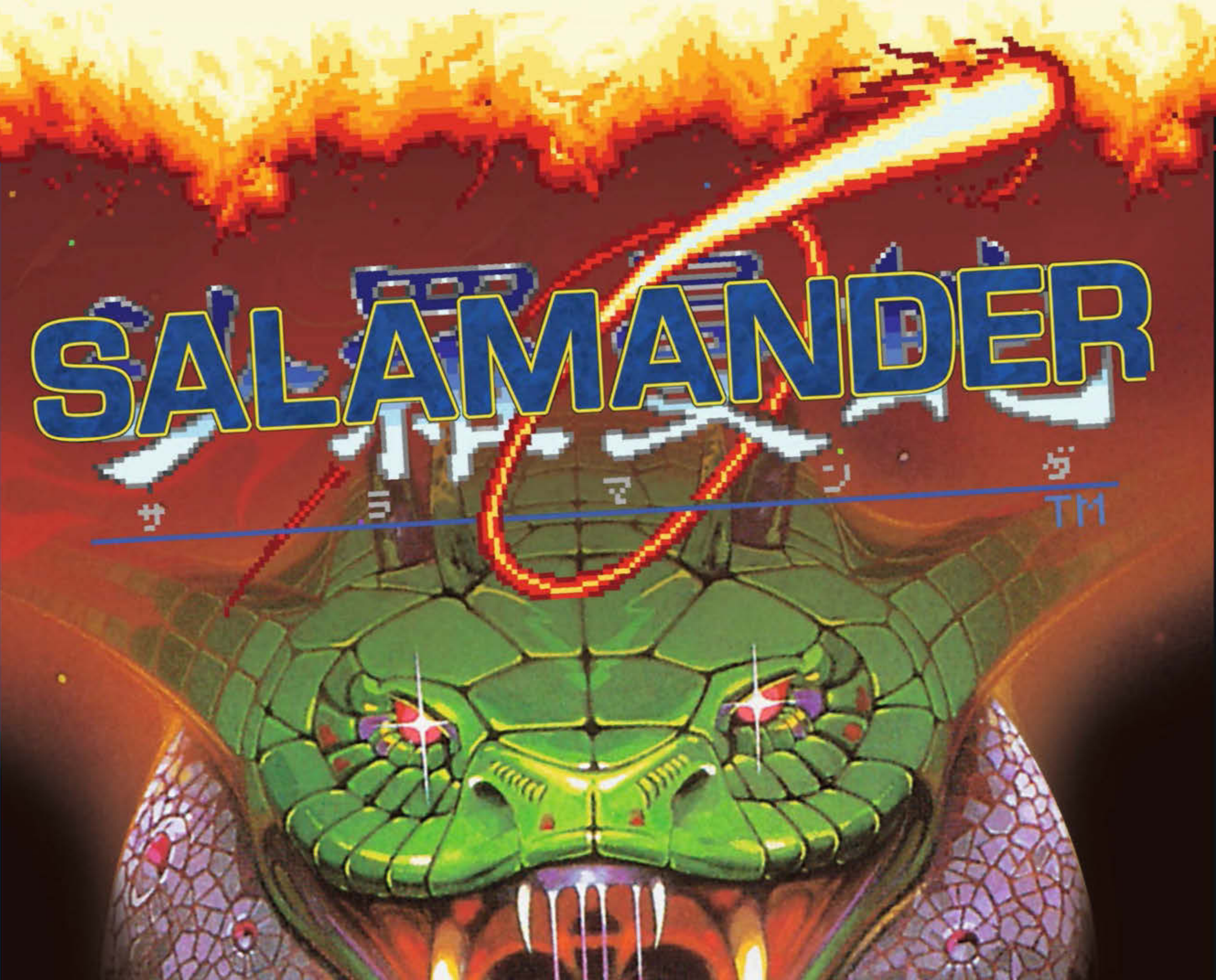
Deluxe Galaga was installed on the hard drive of my A1200 and was played almost daily (more than could be said for most commercial releases), testament indeed to its quality. Being shareware, there were several updates, and it's plain to see that it was a real labour of love. While the first version is a superbly crafted shooter, the final update of *Deluxe Galaga* is a finely tuned sportster of a game. Everything about *Deluxe Galaga* reminds you of those early Eighties shooters. The graphics have a simplicity to them (which nevertheless have been smartened up to AGA standard) while the audio evokes strongly back to times spent in seedy arcades, with its great stereo phasing and wonderful *Gorf*-like speech synthesis. There are plenty of power-ups available and bonus rounds, along with the space-shop where coins collected throughout the game can be exchanged for add-ons and secrets.

There are 75 levels of alien attack to contend with, plenty of different alien craft designs, bosses and attack patterns, a simultaneous two-player mode and many more options available to customise your game. When its 'game over' the hit/miss ratio page of the original is included, plus a saveable high-score table and ranking system that only further encourages re-play. Overall it's a well-produced and structured piece of shareware that creates a good amalgam of early Eighties shooters, with *Galaga* of course at its heart.



RETROBATE PROFILE

- » **NAME:** CLARANCE FRANK
- » **JOINED:** 3 SEPTEMBER 2008
- » **LOCATION:** SKEGGY
- » **OCCUPATION:** AVOIDING MANAGEMENT
- » **FAVE GAME SYSTEM:** C16, AMIGA, PLAYSTATION, GAME BOY



SALAMANDER

A simple spin-off of Gradius or an innovative update? Martyn Carroll revisits Salamander in search of the answer, and also asks questions of the man behind one of the most celebrated home conversions

There comes a moment midway through the first stage of *Salamander* when you think to yourself: "This can't be right. Was it always like this?" You're guiding your tiny ship through the belly of a gigantic beast and yet you have nothing to fear. You've quickly amassed four multiples – those little glowing orbs that replicate your ship's firepower – and they're neatly spread out in vertical formation, spewing rings of laser death across the entire width of the screen. No flying enemies can survive this onslaught, and those that hug the walls are picked off by your two-way missiles. You're basically invincible...

Something is wrong. This is a Konami shooter, a close relation to *Gradius*. By rights you should be proceeding nervously not boldly, trying to stay alive rather than obliterating everything in sight. The clever weapon upgrade system introduced in *Gradius*, where you collect capsules and

PIXEL PERFECT

Some of the sweet sprite designs that feature in Salamander*



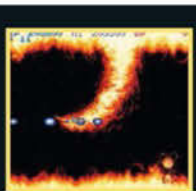
* Names may be made up…

then select your chosen power-up, is absent. Instead, enemies generously drop random power-ups and you just grab them. As such you can upgrade your ship quickly and easily. And if you do get hit, you lose a life and carry on instantly from the same point. There's no being sent back to the last checkpoint. If you're quick you can even recover some of your precious multiples.

So that's the first surprise of *Salamander*: it's easy – easier than you may expect or indeed remember. Even shoot-'em-up novices with wonky hand-to-eye coordination should be able to progress well into the second stage on a single credit. It does get more difficult in later stages, but it's certainly not what seasoned shooter fans might term "bastard hard".

And then there's the second surprise: the viewpoint switch. Even-numbered stages scroll vertically, with enemies raining down from above. "Go up!" prompts the game's excitable announcer (as if you have a choice). It's hardly pioneering stuff but it's an interesting spin that adds welcome variety to the game. In addition, the vertical stages provide a little more width for two players to manoeuvre. Ah yes – *Salamander* also introduces cooperative play. Joining Vic Viper from *Gradius* is a second ship, Lord British, resplendent in red (okay, slightly pink). Besides the obvious fun of being able to blast enemies alongside a friend, the co-op mode enables players to 'buy in' when their lives have all gone, thereby funding voyages to *Salamander*'s later stages.

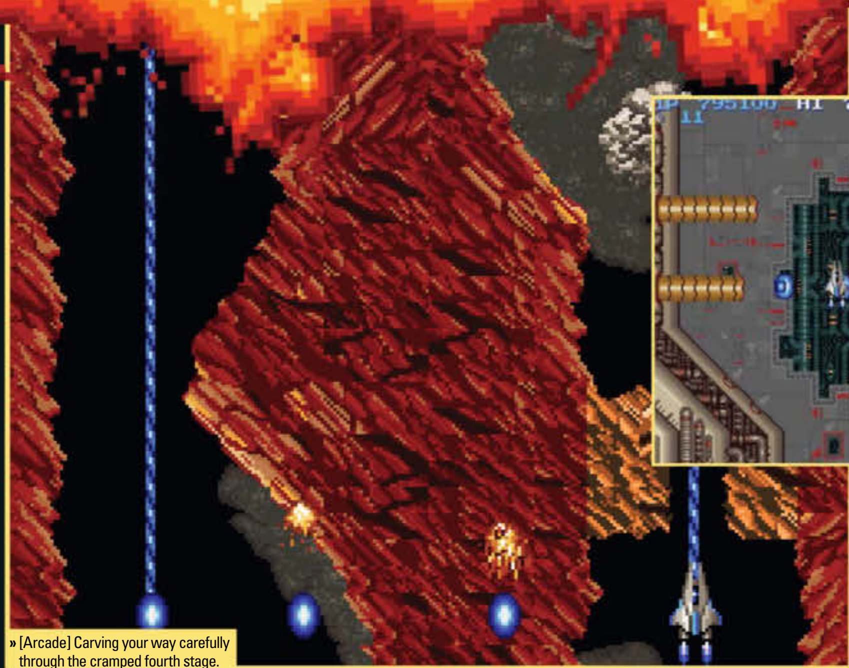
Salamander may not sit within the core *Gradius* series, yet its influence on it is clear. The features highlighted above – reduced difficulty, co-op play and, to some extent, changing viewpoint – have all been incorporated into the later *Gradius* games. Staple weapons, such as the ripple laser and two-way missile, made their debut in *Salamander* too, and most of the game's bosses would rear their ugly heads in various *Gradius* sequels. The game's legacy is strong from both a gameplay and content perspective.



» [Arcade] The arcing fire flares on the third stage were a real 'wow' moment back in the day.

Just as *Gradius* was released as *Nemesis* in some territories, *Salamander* also appeared under the title *Life Force*. This was more than a simple renaming exercise however, as there are actually three versions of the game.

First is the original *Salamander* which debuted in Japanese arcades in July 1986. This version was exported around the world, with the exception of North America where it was re-titled *Life Force*. Besides the new name, some noticeable



» [Arcade] Carving your way carefully through the cramped fourth stage.



» [Arcade] Having defeated the final boss you have to escape through a series of rapidly closing gates!

changes were made to the game. A simple backstory was added to the Attract mode, revealing that the action takes place inside an immense alien being that has become infected by deadly bacteria and your job is to actually save it by wiping out the infection. This story was obviously inspired by the opening stage and its fleshy walls and gnashing teeth. As per the *Fantastic Voyage* vibe, sections of the game that featured a moving star field were replaced by a membrane-like background.

Then in June 1987, a third version, also titled *Life Force*, was unveiled in Japan. This release went much further in accommodating the 'body' plot and setting. The star fields were removed, like in the US release, but now lots of additional tweaks and changes were made to the graphics to give them a more organic feel. Stage Three became the 'stomach' zone, with the 'fire' re-coloured blue to represent intestinal fluid. A couple of the mechanical bosses were also redesigned to make them look like living creatures. The key gameplay change was the introduction of the *Gradius* upgrade system. This made the game more difficult than *Salamander* as it now took much longer to amass multiples.

The different arcade releases complicated matters when it came to the various home conversions. The Famicom and MSX versions were titled *Salamander* yet they clearly had more in common with the Japanese *Life Force* (they featured the *Gradius* power-up bar, for example). Both versions also added exclusive stages, different bosses and token weirdness. The Commodore 64, ZX Spectrum and Amstrad CPC versions were all based on *Salamander* and published by Konami (and later republished on Ocean's Imagine label). These versions were missing a couple of stages and lacked the two-player mode.

More faithful versions later appeared on the Sharp X68000 and PC Engine. Even better was the *Salamander Deluxe Pack Plus* released for the Saturn and PlayStation in 1997. Not only did this collection feature perfect ports of the original *Salamander* and the Japanese *Life Force*, but it also included the hot 1996 arcade sequel *Salamander 2*! Unfortunately this collection was only released in Japan. It was a similar story with the 2007 PSP release *Salamander Portable*, which included the same games as the PSone/Saturn pack plus some nice extras – the arcade shooter *Xexex* and the MSX version of *Gradius II*. This was exclusive to Japan, but as PSP games are region-free it has become a desirable import.

In some ways it's a shame that *Salamander* wasn't included in the *Gradius Collection*, the earlier PSP pack that *was* released outside of Japan. But then, it's only right that an eminent shooter like *Salamander* should be given its very own collection.



» [Arcade] Released ten years after the original, *Salamander 2* shows off the first of its mighty bosses.

COIN-OP CONVERSIONS

As with most home conversions, the end results ranged from poor to perfect



NES

This version takes various liberties, which is not a criticism. The level order is changed, new stages are introduced and exclusive boss encounters are added. It's fun to discover all of the changes in what is a solid shooter.





MSX

If the NES version takes liberties, this MSX release does its own thing. There are altered stages, new stages, stages you can play in any order, hidden stages – you name it. But it plays poorly with jerky scrolling.

Commodore 64

A surprisingly faithful conversion. It's missing Stages Four and Five, but generally the game is very close to the coin-op. The graphics are fantastic and it plays really well. The bothersome multi-load aside, this is a shining effort.





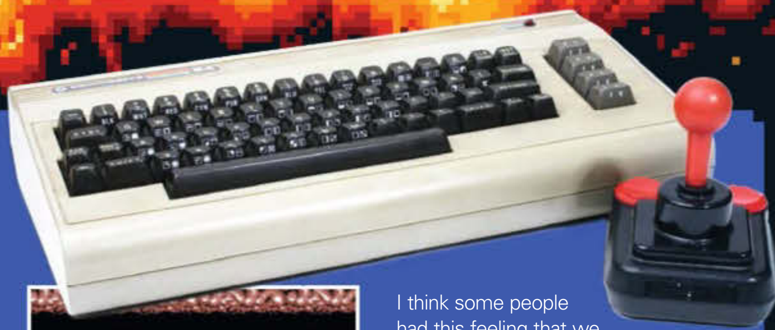
ZX Spectrum

This version is rather truncated. The final two stages are missing, as are the bosses from Stages Two and Three. The main problem is that the playing area is very tight, giving you no room to manoeuvre your ship.

CREATING C64 MAGIC

Programmer Pete Baron talks about the challenge of squeezing Salamander onto the 8-bit home computer





How did you end up with the *Salamander* job?
I'd done a few jobs for a company called Nemesis Management that had the rights to a lot of the Konami conversions. It'd already had a big hit with the *Nemesis* conversion so they wanted to do *Salamander*. Apparently it was considered a very tough conversion and several more experienced programmers had turned it down, but I was getting results on everything they threw my way so they decided to ask me too. I was given £10 worth of 10p coins and told to head out to a cafe opposite King's Cross tube station and play the arcade machine there. I took a notepad and made a bunch of notes as I continually fed coins into the thing, slowly blasting my way through the levels and eventually beating it.

The prospect of converting it all to the C64 must have been daunting.
There were a few things that looked tricky – lots of enemies, the sheer amount of firepower, the brain at the end of the first level and the flames. I got back to them with a task breakdown and my proposed solutions to the trickier problems and after some negotiating they gave me the go-ahead.

Did you have access to the arcade game during development?
Yes, I was given a terrible old CRT monitor with permanent burn-in, a joystick contraption in a steel box and two motherboards connected by an edge connector ribbon cable. After a bit of playing around I found that by sticking a piece of cardboard between the two boards they wouldn't short-out against each other all the time.

Did you work alongside Bob Stevenson (graphics) and Mark Cooksey (music)?
It was almost entirely remote work. I think I met Mark once or twice briefly, and I got together with Bob once at the beginning of the project and then a few times during it. We just ended up with huge phone bills!

How long did the development take, and what would you say was the most challenging aspect?
It took almost exactly a year to make the game. The rough shell was done very quickly but there were a huge number of exception cases to make it all work like the arcade. The hardest part was the brain boss which I really didn't want to cop-out on as it was the first boss and would make an important impression on players. In the end I used sprites for the brain, made the player's multiples flicker and wrote a software sprite system to mask graphics into the user-defined

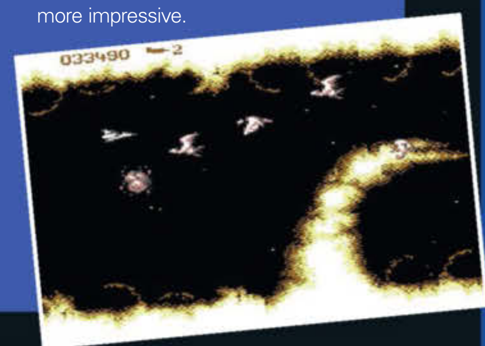


character set in order to draw the arm with a claw. That system took two weeks to get working and optimised, and even then it slowed the game down from 50fps to 25fps.

The C64 version omits a couple of stages. Was this due to lack of time?
When I submitted the task breakdown I realised there wasn't enough time to make all of the stages, so I picked the best four, in my opinion, and told them that they could have the other two if they'd add a month to the project duration. They decided not to do that.

One element of the game that has drawn criticism is the multi-load.
At that time it was uncommon for a shoot-'em-up to use a multi-load and it wasn't our favourite decision. Unfortunately the game used nearly the full 64Kb of memory for each level, so it was essential to break it into components. There wasn't any other choice if we wanted the game to look like the original, given the huge variety in terrains and enemy ships. I think some people had this feeling that we could have made it fit into a single load if we'd just tried a bit harder, but the program code was reasonably small so that would only happen if the art was degraded substantially. Typically each level switched user-defined character sets between two and four times. This was done on-the-fly in the open 'space' stretches or we built an overlapping section of terrain where there wasn't a suitable open area. Each character set also needed space allocated for all the weaponry.

Overall, how pleased were you with the finished game?
I was delighted with the game in the end. As my first solo project I felt that I'd done a pretty good job overall. I would have liked to include the extra levels for the sake of completeness, and if I'd had a bit more time I think I might have got the software sprite system to run at 50fps which would have made that first boss more impressive.





Amstrad CPC

A straight port from the Spectrum version that actually manages to be inferior. Fewer colours are used and movement is sluggish. It retains the harsh difficulty level; completing the first stage is a huge challenge.

Sharp X68000

For arcade-at-home fun the X68000 rarely disappoints, and it doesn't here with this perfect port. It's so close to the coin-op, right down to the same demo routines, that there's surely some emulation trickery at work.





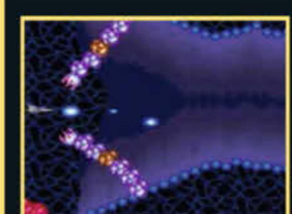
PC Engine

Released in 1991, this is a slight improvement over the coin-op with richer colours and sound. The only disconcerting issue is that on the horizontal stages, the screen scrolls vertically a little to fit everything on.

Saturn/PSone

The Sega and Sony consoles received an arcade-perfect port of *Salamander*, as you'd expect, bundled along with *Life Force* (JPN version) and *Salamander 2*. A cinematic intro video nicely completes this fine compilation.





PSP

This great retrospective collection features the *Salamander* games and a couple of bonus shooters from the archives. Various game options are available and the games look great when stretched on the PSP's screen.

BOSS RUSH

1 Difficulty level

A rundown of the biological beasties and mechanical nasties you face in Salamander



2

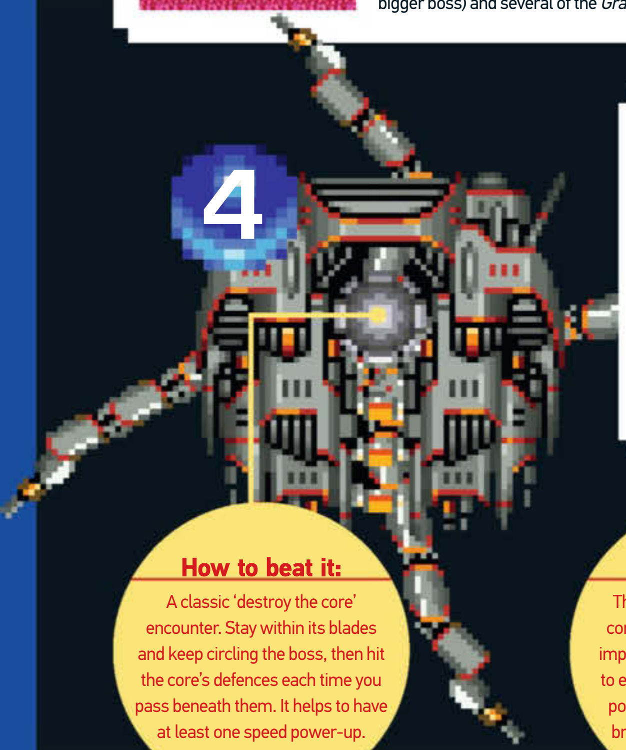
How to beat it:

Considering this boss is brain matter and little else, its actions are pretty dumb. You simply nip behind it so that its arms follow you, then circle quickly around to the front and hammer its exposed eye.



Brain Golem

"Destroy eye of demon!" advises the game as you approach this monstrous organ lurking at the end of the first stage. Two elongated 'arms' grope in your general direction as the boss moves to try and swipe your ship or crush you against the side of the screen. It's a brief but memorable encounter, and Brain Golem would go on to make appearances in both *Salamander 2* (where it's comically chomped by an even bigger boss) and several of the *Gradius* games.



4

How to beat it:

A classic 'destroy the core' encounter. Stay within its blades and keep circling the boss, then hit the core's defences each time you pass beneath them. It helps to have at least one speed power-up.

Tetran



It's Tetran, otherwise known as 'the lawnmower boss' by the less educated. As it approaches, four deadly blade-like arms extent from its metal shell and begin to spin. The boss then starts to circle the screen and you need to move with it to avoid being mowed. Following this debut appearance in Stage Two, Tetran would become a regular boss in the *Gradius* universe. In the Japanese version of *Life Force*, Tetran is given a biological makeover and renamed Zylon.



7

How to beat it:

Those mini spheres just keep coming and eventually become impossible to dodge, so you need to expose the cores as quickly as possible. Use your multiples to break down the core barriers.

Centre Core

Probably the most boring boss in the game, as well as the most frustrating. It's basically a gun wall with three cores. Each of these weak spots needs to be exposed and destroyed before you can progress. It defends itself with several turrets, which are easily destroyed. More troublesome are the mini spheres it ejects, which are seemingly indestructible and bounce wildly around the screen. *Life Force* aside, this is Centre Core's only appearance in the series.



Intruder



The boss at the finale of the show-stopping third stage is an irate fire dragon. Intruder will make a beeline for you, spitting fire as it approaches. It will then attempt to restrict your movement by circling its snake-like body around your ship. Although not a regular boss, Intruder does make cameo appearances in both *Gradius II* (where it gains the ability to split into three mini dragons) and *Gradius Gaiden*. In *Life Force*, Intruder keeps its name but is blue in colour.



5

How to beat it:

A Intruder has no discernible end to its tale, so the obvious target is its fiery head. The easiest method is to let it circle you, then keep hammering the head. Position multiples for max damage.



6

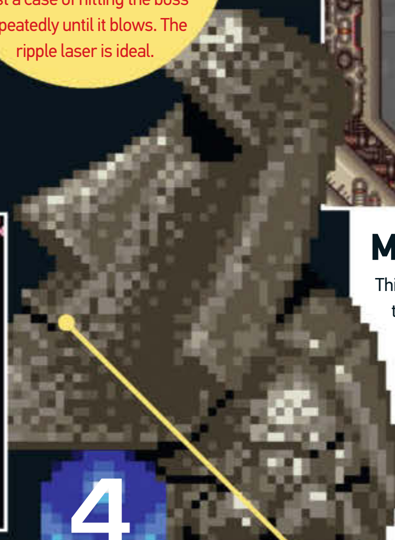
Death

The biggest surprise in this encounter is that the ship zooms in from the left rather than the right, catching out unsuspecting players who may be hanging back. It then adopts a traditional attack pattern, moving vertically and firing occasional projectiles. Death would become a common 'big ship' enemy in the *Gradius* universe, usually appearing with upgraded attacks and evolved tactics. In *Life Force*, Death is replaced by a Giger-esque creature named Gau.



How to beat it:

Although Death does have a glowing blue core, there's no method of exposing it (beyond destroying its front hatch). It's just a case of hitting the boss repeatedly until it blows. The ripple laser is ideal.



4



Moai Heads

This silly, staple enemy made its first appearance in the third stage of *Gradius*, where the stone heads filled the screen with their brightly coloured projectiles. Here they provide players with one final obstacle to overcome before facing the final boss. Befitting their promotion to a mini-boss role, they're now far more animated and they bounce around the screen, spitting rings at you. This peculiar variety of jumping Moai would return in *Gradius II*.

How to beat it:

The general trick with these is to aim for the mouth. However, dousing them with your ripple laser is usually enough to see them off. You need to target them early before they can start firing.



3

Big Core

It's the classic boss ship found at the end of most stages in the original *Gradius*. The twist here is that there are three of them guarding the entrance to the enemy stronghold and you have to fight them in sequence. Here, the ships are slightly smaller and faster than previously. Big Cores are primary bosses that appear, in one form or another, in the vast majority of *Gradius* games. In *Life Force*, the ships are not redesigned like some other bosses.



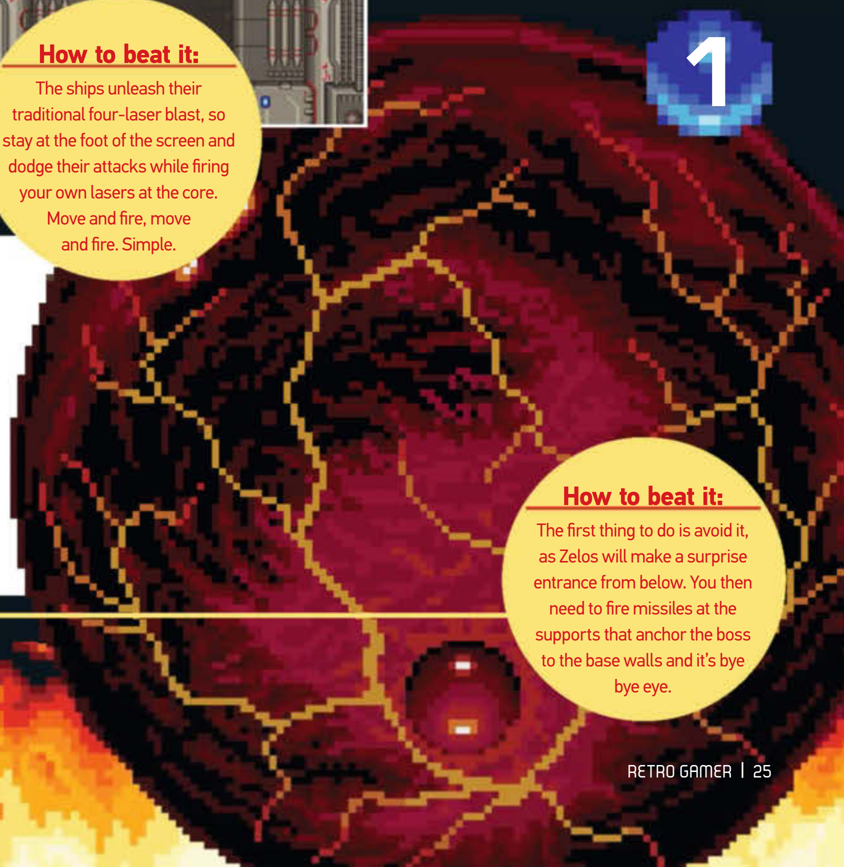
How to beat it:

The ships unleash their traditional four-laser blast, so stay at the foot of the screen and dodge their attacks while firing your own lasers at the core. Move and fire, move and fire. Simple.



Zelos

Resembling a huge beady eye, Zelos lies in wait at the end of the sixth and final stage. And just like the Brain boss at the conclusion of *Gradius*, it's an intentional anti-climax. You see, once all of its defences have been destroyed, the final boss is essentially an exposed core that simply needs extinguishing before you make your escape. A pushover, yet Zelos would go on to have a recurring role in the *Gradius* series and it would learn how to defend itself a little better.



1

How to beat it:

The first thing to do is avoid it, as Zelos will make a surprise entrance from below. You then need to fire missiles at the supports that anchor the boss to the base walls and it's bye bye eye.

A MOMENT WITH...

Miles Jacobson

Every issue, we put an industry veteran in the hotseat. This month, David Crookes spoke to Miles Jacobson, who has been involved with both Championship Manager and Football Manager





» [PC] Looks like time has caught up on itself.

Who is Miles Jacobson?

He is the man who is perhaps responsible for more marriage breakdowns than any other person in history. He is, of course, studio director of Sports Interactive, creators of the original *Championship Manager* and the current *Football Manager* series of games. Jacobson worked in the music industry before joining SI but he was one of the early testers of the earlier titles.

Which of your games would you recommend to our readers and why?
Always the latest version – so much love goes into making the game each year, and it keeps on getting better. That said, we also understand that not everyone has the time to put into the 'main' PC game, so we now have a mode on there called 'Classic' mode which is a bit simpler. It still has the great AI that we've spent 20 years working on but it cuts back on a lot of the time-consuming features. So Classic mode is probably perfect for **Retro Gamer** readers. As is our iOS game, *Football Manager Handheld*.

What is your proudest memory?
There are so many. The thing I'm proudest of though has been keeping the team together. We've been going for 21 years now, growing organically, and very few people leave the studio. We have more than 40 who have been part of the team for five years, and getting on for 20 who've been part of the team for more than ten years.

What's the most difficult thing you've encountered while working on a game?
Lawyers. Don't get me wrong, our lawyers are great, but when there's a problem it's them that have to break the bad news.

Is there a particular industry veteran you most admire?
David Braben. A brain the size of a planet, so humble, and continually wants to make the tech world a better place.

How would you like your games to be remembered in the future?
The best value for money games on the market. They're certainly not the most beautiful games!

Which videogame do you wish you'd made and why?
I've been very fortunate to work on my favourite genre of game and manage to somehow make a living out of it. I enjoy lots of other people's work, but I'm also very happy sticking to what I know.

What opportunities has making videogames given you?
As well as being able to entertain millions of people a year around the world whilst being able to stay relatively anonymous (which is definitely the best of both worlds), it's also given me the opportunity to work with some amazing charities, like WarChild, Nordoff Robbins, Special Effect and GamesAid, and help with the work they are doing. I also get to go to football matches and claim it to be 'work' to my girlfriend. Which it is. Obviously.



» [PC] *Championship Manager* went down a storm on the PC, absorbing lots of player hours.

What's your darkest memory of being in the games industry?
Equal first here – one was a 72 hour crunch session before we knew better where I finally went to sleep when I thought there were dinosaurs attacking the 2D blobs on the screen due to hallucinating, the second when the realisation hit that we really had stopped working on our previous brand and were going to attempt what most in the industry said was impossible by switching to a new brand and a new publisher. Thankfully the second only lasted one night of lost sleep because we knew that the decision was the right one, even if everyone else disagreed.

And your best?
The UK industry admitting that they'd got it wrong on the switch with an award for best studio at the (now defunct) InDin awards the year that the first *FM* came out. Or our first BAFTA, which is when my mum stopped telling me to get another job.

Can you share one interesting anecdote about your time in the industry?
Popping round Robbie Williams's house to help him get the game installed – that's customer support at its finest! He had a Mac and was trying to install the PC version.

How has the industry changed over the last 20 years?
It's proving itself to be circular. When SI first started, it was a couple of guys in a bedroom who made a game for themselves. Then it went all massive studios making games with $100m budgets, with a few smaller teams like ours bucking that trend. Now there's room for everyone – the resurgence of the bedroom coder is there for everyone to see.



» [PC] *Football Manager* continues to be massively popular.





TOP CHUMPS

GAMING'S GREATEST UNDERDOGS

Retro Gamer examines a host of once popular videogame heroes and speaks to the developers who helped create them

A good mascot can do you proud. It can instantly make your brand recognisable and give you a platform to immediately sell games from. The very biggest characters like Sonic, Mario and Lara Croft even outgrow their original medium, crossing over to mainstream acceptance. Not every character is as fortunate however, and for every success like Mario, there's a list of casualties as long as your arm. With that in mind, we wanted to take this opportunity to highlight some of our favourite characters from the Eighties and Nineties.

Some of them had noble intentions that failed spectacularly, some of them sprung up from the success of others, while others briefly enjoyed status as the face of a company before being cruelly dumped in favour of other, more popular characters. We've also been lucky enough to contact various developers to find out how they breathed life into the oddball selection of heroes that we've included. So join us as we take a look at gaming's greatest underdogs. How many of these sadly forsaken videogame heroes do you remember?







MASTER HIGGINS

WE CAME SO, so close to adding Wonder Boy but ultimately he lost out to an even bigger prehistoric underdog – namely Hudson Soft's Master Higgins. It's an interesting tale though, for the two characters' pasts are intertwined and share much in common. The most obvious is that, aside from its main character and music, *Adventure Island* – Master Higgins' first game – is essentially a NES conversion of *Wonder Boy*. Hudson Soft was working on the port with Escape (the creator of *Wonder Boy* and later known as Westone) but decided to make the main character in the image of Takahashi Meijin, Hudson Soft's spokesman. As a result, Master Higgins shares a lot of traits with Wonder Boy, including a love of skateboards and throwing stone clubs.

The differences between the two characters become more notable with subsequent games. While Westone continued to develop the character of Wonder Boy so that he appeared in more varied adventures, Master Higgins refused to evolve; sticking with more conventional platforming fare in his subsequent adventures on the NES and other consoles. He certainly had a good ear for a tune (both SNES games feature stunning soundtracks) and was making appearances in games as late as 2009, but he never went on to achieve the same success as Wonder Boy.

"I've thought about doing another arcade adventure game, but I don't think it would include Wally"

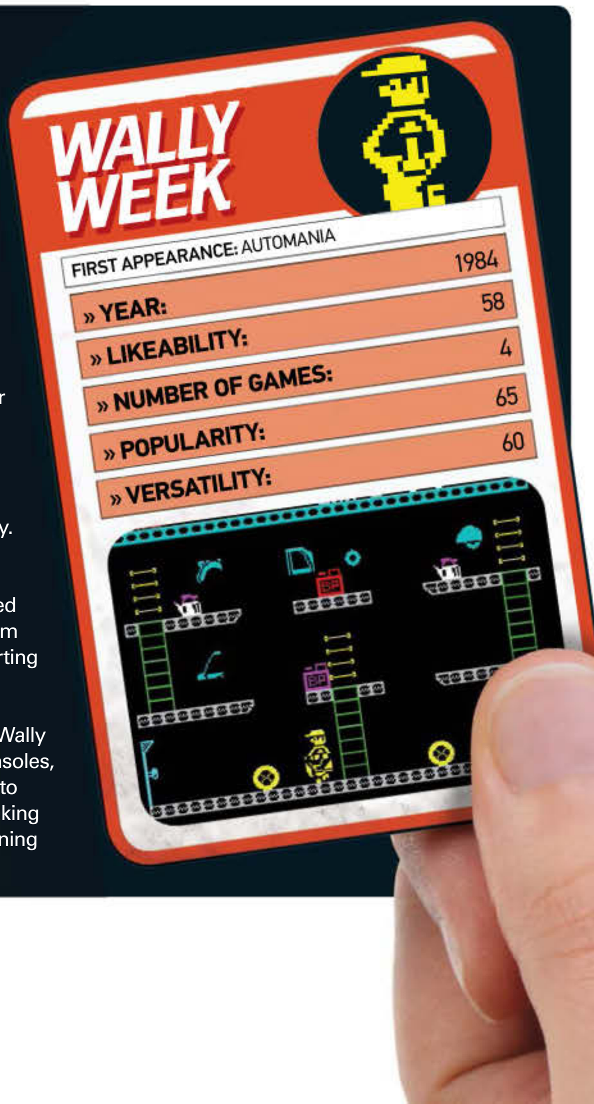
Chris Hinsley

WALLY WEEK

WALLY IS NOT your usual star. Rather than being a fantastic superhero, or a cute critter, he's nothing more than an aging mechanic, stuck in a job performing menial tasks. And yet this unassuming character turned out to strike a chord with a fair amount of gamers when he was first conceived in Chris Hinsley's *Automania*.

Mikro-Gen's Mike Meek felt that the company should have some sort of Miner Willy character and Wally Week seemed the obvious choice, particularly as he had already starred in a popular game. Sequels like *Pyjamarama* and *Everyone's A Wally* soon followed, and not only established Wally as a character who was as comfortable in adventures as he was in games that required arcade-like reflexes, but also introduced his family.

Chris Hinsley eventually lost interest in the Wally character and turned his attention to other projects at Mikro-Gen. The *Wally Week* brand lived on though, with David Perry (who would later form Shiny Entertainment and had cut his teeth converting *Everyone's A Wally* to the Amstrad) working on *Herbert's Dummy Run* and the highly impressive *Three Weeks In Paradise*. Despite his popularity, Wally never appeared on any 16-bit computers and consoles, managing five games before Mikro-Gen put him to rest. Mikro-Gen itself was bought out in 1987, making it highly unlikely that we'll ever meet this entertaining everyman ever again.





EVERYDAY HERO

Chris Hinsley discusses the creation of Wally Week

Was Wally considered to be Micro-Gen's mascot?
Mascot definitely, but eventually we realised that we didn't want to get stuck with a Wally label!

Was he a solid rival to Miner Willy?
As far as being a competitive to *Manic Miner*, we certainly had enough titles [reach] number one in the charts.

What were Wally's main strengths and weaknesses?
Wally worked very well as a single character but extending the gang to his workmates etc allowed us to go much further into multi-character arcade adventuring. Plus Herbert got his own spin-off too. So a very flexible character indeed.

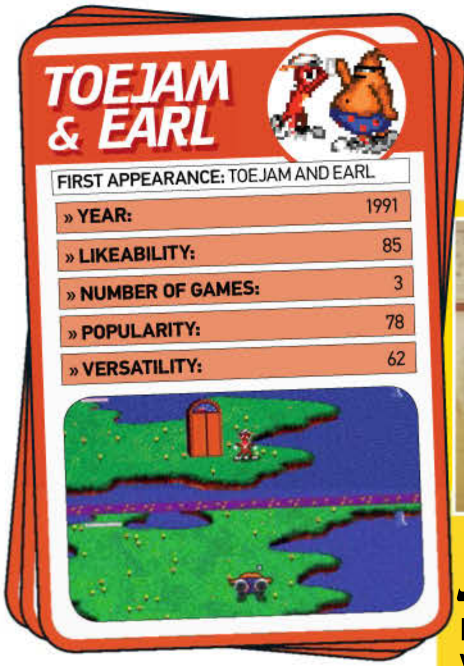
Why do you think Wally remains so popular?
I think Wally games are remembered because [they] were the first to introduce proper adventuring to an arcade game format! Not just a collection game but real adventure puzzling.

Have you ever been tempted to do a new Wally game?
I have thought about doing another room-based arcade adventure game, but I don't think it would include Wally. Apart from the fact that that trademark is now owned by somebody else!



TOP CHUMPS

TOEJAM & EARL



OKAY, SO THEY'RE two characters, but ToeJam & Earl are inseparable, so we're treating them as one underdog. Thanks to recent digital releases the funky duo from Funkatron have never strayed too far from our hearts. They are, however underdogs, constantly overlooked by Sega in favour of more bankable stars like Sonic and… Well, Sonic. The original *ToeJam And Earl* felt like a breath of fresh air when they first rapped and jammed their way onto Sega's 16-bit console in 1991 and their debut game remains immense fun to play.

ToeJam and his best friend Earl are two of the strangest heroes you could hope to meet, being funky aliens who have crash-landed on Earth and must escape in their broken spacecraft. Dressed in Nineties clothing – Earl sports oversized sunglasses and a pair of hi-tops, while ToeJam resorts to a backwards baseball cap and a blinging chain – they look as if their entire knowledge of Earth comes from extensively studying MTV.

The inhabitants of Earth are just as surreal as our alien duo, boasting such oddities as giant hamsters enclosed in huge balls, portly devils and tomato-shooting chickens. Even Santa Claus shows up, attacking the alien pair as they seek out presents and the missing bits of their craft.

After the acclaim of *ToeJam And Earl* the pair went on to star in a more traditional platform game in 1993, again for Sega's Mega Drive, before finally appearing in 3D for the first and only time in *ToeJam And Earl III: Mission To Earth* on Microsoft's Xbox in 2002. Despite some interesting ideas, the duo's third outing was let down by some bland level design and an errant camera and, while it retained the humour of past games, it lacked the same amount of polish.

Digital releases on PS3, PC and Xbox 360 and a recent unearthing of the originally planned Dreamcast game of *Mission To Earth* has shown revived interest in the pair lately, but it's highly unlikely that we'll ever see a new outing for the dynamic duo.

BILLY BLAZE

MANY PC GAMERS will be fully aware of the exploits of Billy Blaze, as his adventures were often given away for free. Okay, so the *Commander Keen* games were released via shareware, meaning you only got access to a few levels, with the option of paying for later episodes, but it worked out surprisingly well for those developers that used it. It was not only a great way of testing a game's quality, but also ensured that as many gamers as possible got to meet your latest videogame creation.

Thought up by id's Tom Hall, Billy Blaze's greatest strength is that any gamer can associate with him. After all, who didn't dream of being a spaceman when they were playing in their back garden? The key difference here though is Billy gets to make those fantasies a reality thanks to his alter ego Commander Keen – a platforming expert who's never far away from a useful pogo stick or hi-tech gun.

Famed for its super-smooth scrolling and cleverly designed levels, *Commander Keen* was a revelation at the time and the character soon went on to appear in several sequels. While he's not had a personal hit in over a decade he continues to crop up in numerous fan projects and cameos. Here's hoping id realises what a popular character it still has access to.





JAMMIN'

Designer Greg Johnson gets down and funky with the alien duo

Why make Toejam and Earl aliens?
Making them aliens allowed me to have some fun depicting the Earthlings as the aliens would see them, basically scary and completely insane.

Personality-wise were they based on anybody?
Not really. They are more archetypes. There is the small skinny one who is high energy and high tension and likes to lead, and the bigger laid back one who is cool and easy going and doesn't mind following. By having two different character types, it lets you create some dynamism in the relationship, and it gives people and interesting choice of who they want to identify with.

Why do you think the pair remain so popular?
That's an easy one to answer. I believe it's for two reasons. First because *TJ&E* was so different from the games of its time, both in theme, tone and play-style. It was light, funny and relaxed, and those feelings are ones that people remember with fondness. The other reason is because it was such a light-hearted cooperative two-player game. People often remember feelings of playing and laughing with some friend or brother or sister, or even parent, with nostalgia. It's one of those things we never could have planned, but it's been nice to hear over the years that the game conjures important childhood memories for people.

Would ToeJam and Earl have the same success if they were released today?
Who knows? I guess I would doubt it. There is so much more competition out there now than there used to be. And expectations are different. Hmmm… That said, it's built on some pretty basic *Rogue*-style mechanics and the two-player features are pretty fun and solid. I hear from fans who go and replay it that they feel it still holds up and is enjoyed by their families – so maybe.

Will we ever see a fourth *ToeJam And Earl* game?
I keep getting asked about doing a Kickstarter-funded version of the game. I'm still not sure if I'll do this or not. I'd like to, but unfortunately I can only build one thing at a time and there are so many games I want to make. It's generally more exciting creatively to go after something brand new. But I do still have a very special place in my heart for *Toejam And Earl*, and I'd love to deliver something to *TJ&E* fans at long last. I guess we'll see where the winds of fate blow me. My old *TJ&E* partner Mark Voorsanger is off doing other things these days, but I'd love to work with him again. Maybe I can talk him into it…





MEGA MAN





OKAY, SO SOME of you are no doubt wondering why Mega Man is in our list. After all, he's starred in a colossal number of games compared to everyone else featured here and has been knocking around the industry for an impressive 26 years. He even made your recent Videogame Icons list, making him the most recognisable character we're covering here.

The reason we're covering him is fairly simple, he's had a massive fall from grace in recent years and Capcom no longer seems to know what to do with him, cancelling games left, right and centre and giving him very little presence in the West. Sure, games were released to mark his 25th anniversary, but they were either confined to Japan or were fan projects with little actual risk to Capcom itself. Once upon a time though it was all so different, with the release of a new *Mega Man* game being cause for celebration.

Mega Man's popularity first began on the NES/Famicom thanks to a string of highly successful platformers created by Tokuro Fujiwara, Keiji Inafune and Akira Kitamura. While the games were tough to play, they boasted smart level design and a host of brilliantly designed and highly memorable bosses who could typically be tackled in any order. Defeat these mighty mayors and Mega Man would gain access to their over-the-top weaponry, giving him a stronger fighting chance against the remaining bosses.

It remains a great concept for a game and has been used predominantly throughout the series. The original *Mega Man* was a surprise success for Capcom, so much so that anticipation for *Mega Man 2* reached fever pitch levels, with the sequel eventually selling over 1.5 million units and becoming the best selling game in the series. More games followed, including a jump to the Game Boy, but Capcom wasn't done with Mega Man (or Rockman as he's known in Japan) and the cracks began to slowly show. The last recent release was *Rockman Xover* for iOS, a disappointing adventure that Capcom has so far decided not to release in the West due to a negative response from fans.

It's a rather sad ending to a character that once adorned everything from TV shows to action figures and energy drinks but perhaps it's what Capcom deserves, as it's done little to push Mega Man in the last ten years. Instead, it's been happy to offer him cameos in the likes of *Street Fighter X Tekken* and the incoming *Super Smash Bros* game. It's something of a delicious irony then that co-creator Keiji Inafune's first project since leaving Capcom, *Mighty No 9*, shares more than a few similarities with Capcom's popular hero, easily passing its $900,000 target to eventually reach $3,845,170. Capcom might not have the same faith in Mega Man it once did but 67,226 of his fans clearly do.

"Mega Man would gain access to to their over-the-top weaponry, giving him a stronger fighting chance"





TOP CHUMPS

ANIMAL MAGIC

The anthropomorphic heroes that all competed for your attention…

JAZZ JACKRABBIT

» FIRST APPEARANCE:	JAZZ JACKRABBIT
» YEAR:	1994
» LIKEABILITY:	80
» NUMBER OF GAMES:	3
» POPULARITY:	73
» VERSATILITY:	55

■ Cliff Bleszinski is best known nowadays for the *Gears Of War* franchise, but he created a more enjoyable one in the Nineties. Jazz Jackrabbit stemmed from Cliff's love of Sonic and remains one of the best alternatives to Sega's mascot. He eventually appeared in three games, although fans aren't as keen on his 2002 GBA adventure.



AERO

» FIRST APPEARANCE:	AERO THE ACRO-BAT
» YEAR:	1993
» LIKEABILITY:	67
» NUMBER OF GAMES:	2
» POPULARITY:	48
» VERSATILITY:	50

■ This little bat was the mascot for Japanese developer Sunsoft and went on to appear in two games for the Mega Drive and SNES. Like many critters of the time, Aero found himself trapped in a platform game, but unlike his peers it was no *Sonic* clone, instead requiring Aero to perform acrobatic tasks to open up each new stage.



TITUS THE FOX

» FIRST APPEARANCE:	TITUS THE FOX: TO MARRAKECH AND BACK
» YEAR:	1992
» LIKEABILITY:	60
» NUMBER OF GAMES:	1
» POPULARITY:	40
» VERSATILITY:	34

■ This little fellow was the mascot of Titus Interactive. Interestingly, the poor little fellow didn't even get his own official game. Titus already had a platformer called *Les Aventures De Moktar* and simply swapped in Titus for its worldwide release. Not a great way to treat the character adorning your logo.



CJ

» FIRST APPEARANCE:	CJ'S ELEPHANT ANTICS
» YEAR:	1991
» LIKEABILITY:	73
» NUMBER OF GAMES:	4
» POPULARITY:	51
» VERSATILITY:	45

■ Elephants never forget and we've never forgotten CJ. The adorable elephant starred in several enjoyable platformers across a variety of 8 and 16-bit home computers and on the NES. If you're wondering what his initials stand for (we're sure you are), it's Columbus Jumbo.



ALFRED CHICKEN

» FIRST APPEARANCE:	ALFRED CHICKEN
» YEAR:	1993
» LIKEABILITY:	64
» NUMBER OF GAMES:	2
» POPULARITY:	55
» VERSATILITY:	45

■ Originating on the Game Boy, Alfred Chicken briefly became one of gaming's most recognisable birds, appearing on the Amiga 1200, CD32 and NES. Alfred sports several cool abilities and even received a sequel of sorts as *Super Alfred Chicken* on the SNES has completely different levels for the plucky rooster to explore.





PARAPPA

» FIRST APPEARANCE:	PARAPPA THE RAPPER
» YEAR:	1996
» LIKEABILITY:	87
» NUMBER OF GAMES:	2
» POPULARITY:	70
» VERSATILITY:	35

■ At one stage it looked like this delightful rapping puppy might have become the PlayStation's mascot, but it just wasn't meant to be. He went on to star in a sequel on PlayStation 2, before appearing as a playable character in *PlayStation All-Stars Battle Royale*.



SPARKSTER

» FIRST APPEARANCE:	ROCKET KNIGHT ADVENTURES
» YEAR:	1993
» LIKEABILITY:	70
» NUMBER OF GAMES:	4
» POPULARITY:	68
» VERSATILITY:	60

■ All of his three 16-bit adventures were superb, pushing both the Mega Drive and SNES to their limits and delivering excellent varied gameplay. He's since gone on to make several cameo appearances in later games and received a digital reboot in the form of *Rocket Knight*.



PSYCHO FOX

» FIRST APPEARANCE:	PSYCHO FOX
» YEAR:	1989
» LIKEABILITY:	68
» NUMBER OF GAMES:	1
» POPULARITY:	55
» VERSATILITY:	41

■ Another fox, but this one is got far better treatment than Titus. He's the star of yet another platformer, this time on the Master System, but Vic Tokai upped the gameplay by allowing Psycho to transform into three additional animals – a monkey, tiger and hippopotamus – each with their own abilities, making it one of the Master System's best games.



TIKI THE KIWI

» FIRST APPEARANCE:	THE NEW ZEALAND STORY
» YEAR:	1988
» LIKEABILITY:	80
» NUMBER OF GAMES:	2
» POPULARITY:	77
» VERSATILITY:	30

■ Poor old Tiki The Kiwi. He appeared in one of Taito's most imaginative platformers, easily giving Bub and Bob a run for their money, but he was then cruelly dropped by Taito, only appearing in an okay DS adventure, *New Zealand Story Revelation*, in 2007. He deserved so much more.



THE PRAWN LEGACY

Chris Sorrell on Pond's birth and recent Kickstarter failure



Was James Pond ever considered a mascot for Vectordean or Millennium Interactive?
We never set out to make a mascot, but certainly once *Pond 1* had a degree of success Millennium in particular were keen to build on that and to invest in James Pond in a pretty big way.

What made James Pond stand out from other characters at the time?
I think his personality and identity was key. The fact that he was this silly-looking cartoon fish, but the secret agent persona projected onto him made him quite unique and memorable (credit to Millennium MD Michael Hayward for suggesting the James Pond identity, something we instantly ran with). So I think people came for the secret-agent fish and stayed for the decent gaming experience.

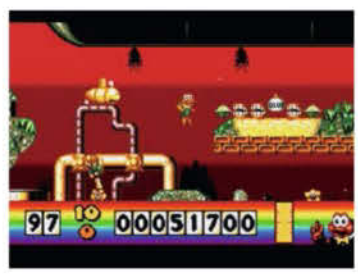
Why do you think James was so popular on the Amiga?
Certainly in the UK, the Amiga was a much more established gaming platform than any contemporary console (Nintendo's NES and Sega's 8-bit system never really took off here). So there were lots of enthusiastic Amiga gamers, but the platform lacked games from the likes of Nintendo and Sega whose brands carried with them that cool arcade heritage and whose console games were really starting to make a name for themselves, even if people were underwhelmed by their 8-bit visuals. That left an opportunity for Amiga developers to try and build games with console playability and charm, but with the improved graphics that the Amiga made possible. I think *James Pond* was one of the first games to hit that sweet-spot and *RoboCod* – which more actively took inspiration from *Mario* – was able to go head to head with the console titles and feel like it was kind of in the same league (not that I'm saying it was of course… obviously Mario was/is the one true king!). So I think Pond provided something that a lot of Amiga owners were looking for but without them having to sell-out and buy a console!

How did you feel when the Kickstarter was cancelled early?
Well, honestly, I had misgivings from day one… I'm never sure how I feel about Kickstarter in general – it can feel a bit too much like 21st Century begging for my liking. I also tend to be a very forward-looking person – reviving James Pond wasn't something I'd really considered. But they convinced me that the goal here was to make a really good, 'all new' *Pond* game, and that Kickstarter was a great way to see what fans wanted and allow them to shape development of the game. I was hopeful that we could sweep aside any failings of past games and really bring the franchise back up to date.

An obvious takeaway for all concerned was that the campaign was very much under-prepared (in terms of having game assets to show). Things I personally took away from the experience… Firstly that there are still a lot of people that care about Pond. It really is a surprise and a privilege to see that after all this time (I'm really sorry if any of those people feel let down by the campaign). And secondly, I now know for sure that Kickstarter really isn't for me! I love designing and making games. I really don't like begging for money so that I can make them! I won't be rushing into it again any time soon!



JAMES POND



IF YOU NEEDED further proof of the current popularity of James Pond you need to only look back a few short months to his planned Kickstarter. Despite getting original creator Chris Sorrell onboard, there simply wasn't the interest in the one-time aquatic secret agent, leaving developer Gameware with no choice but to cancel the project, which was £84,000 short of its £100,000 goal.

James Pond was a big deal when he first made his appearance on the Amiga and other 16-bit home computers and consoles. Released before Sonic came to dominance, James Pond took many of his gaming antics from *Mario*, but married its game mechanics to some fantastic looking sprite design and puns – lots and lots of glorious puns. It's always highly refreshing when you encounter a character that doesn't take itself too seriously, and Chris Sorrell had his tongue firmly in his cheek when he came up with the idea of a fish who modelled himself on Ian Fleming's James Bond.

Ultimately, James Pond won gamers over because he appeared in fun games. *Underwater Agent* was a solid debut featuring plenty of diverse quests for James to solve as he swam through the well-designed stages, while the 1991 sequel *James Pond 2: Codename RoboCod* expanded the gameplay greatly, adding more variety and equipping James with a stretchy suit that allowed him to reach otherwise inaccessible areas. *Operation Starfish* saw James heading to space and let him defy gravity with a useful pair of magno-boots, and while it earned solid scores, it's arguably the weakest main game in terms of ideas and game design. James even found time to star in a fish-themed sports game, but it was obvious that his real appeal lay in the platform genre.

Oh and if you have any sense you'll try and block the supremely disappointing, but deliciously named iOS release *James Pond In The Deathly Shallows* and simply remember James from his 16-bit glory days.



TOP CHUMPS

GOEMON



ALTHOUGH HE FIRST made his appearance in 1986, it would be a further five years before Western gamers became introduced to Konami's colourful hero. *The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja* was a delightful SNES adventure that saw Konami's heroic thief renamed as Kid Ying and teaming up with his sidekick Dr Yang (otherwise known as Ebisumaru in the original Japanese adventures).

Despite its popularity at the time Konami decided against releasing any of the superior SNES sequels in the West. Indeed, Kid Ying/Goemon disappeared from gamer's radars completely, only resurfacing when *Mystical Ninja Starring Goemon* appeared on the Game Boy and N64 in 1997. An equally well-received sequel appeared in 1998, featuring all the nuttiness and crazy antics of past games in the series, but otherwise it spelled the end of Goemon's relationship with Western gamers.

It's unclear why Goemon wasn't embraced in the West like he was in Japan. Perhaps it's due to Konami not wanting to promote a protagonist based on an infamous outlaw that few outside of Japan had heard of, or maybe Konami just wasn't happy with Goemon's all-important sales figures, confining him to his homeland where he was more successful.

What we do know is that Western gamers missed out on some truly entertaining and quirky games and never had the opportunity to fully embrace Goemon in the same way they could with mascots like Mario and Sonic.

GOEMON



FIRST APPEARANCE: MR GOEMON	
» YEAR:	1986
» LIKEABILITY:	75
» NUMBER OF GAMES:	36
» POPULARITY:	57
» VERSATILITY:	70



THE BOGEY MAN

Chris Tremmel chats about Boogerman



So where did Boogerman originate?

The initial direction for *Boogerman* was to simply make a gross game, something that appealed to the Garbage Pail generation of the early Nineties. When the game started it was actually called *The Gross Out Game*. It was multiplayer focussed and the object was to gross out the other player-characters by doing overly disgusting things in-game. At a certain point, one of us came up with the idea of a character named Captain Flatulence. From there we latched onto to the idea of a gross superhero world, expanded the idea beyond flatulence, and Boogerman was born.

What makes him stand out from other characters of the time?

At the time, there was nothing like Boogerman in terms of a character. While he was pretty gross, he was still a likable guy. I also think that brand of humour has a timeless appeal to it. Sure, some people grow out of it and don't think it's that funny anymore, but we definitely still laugh when we think about or play the original game. At the end of the day, the original game and concept was made with nothing but pure fun in mind; we wanted to make you laugh and I think that showed.

Why weren't there ever any *Boogerman* sequels?



We actually started a sequel for the Sega Saturn. We had some big plans and were moving into a 2D/3D type of engine that resembled something like *Clockwork Knight*. Mike Stragey and myself ended up getting an offer to make another game for EA and eventually we left to pursue this opportunity. It's hard to remember exactly why we left the idea of *Boogerman 2* behind, but I assume we had a good reason at the time.

RISE OF THE UNDERDOGS

The videogame heroes and heroines that deserved to make a bigger impact

BOOGERMAN

» FIRST APPEARANCE:	BOOGERMAN: A PICK AND FLICK ADVENTURE
» YEAR:	1994
» LIKEABILITY:	58
» NUMBER OF GAMES:	1
» POPULARITY:	50
» VERSATILITY:	48

■ We've got a crude sense of humour, so we find fart jokes fun and still maintain that the vomit scene in *Stand By Me* beats all others. It should come as no surprise to learn that we're fans of the bogey-flicking Boogerman, a quirky superhero who combined crudeness and slick platforming to great effect. We're clearly not alone as over 1,000 people are requesting his return via Kickstarter.



MANUEL 'MANNY' CALAVERA

» FIRST APPEARANCE:	GRIM FANDANGO
» YEAR:	1998
» LIKEABILITY:	79
» NUMBER OF GAMES:	1
» POPULARITY:	80
» VERSATILITY:	48

■ This undead private investigator sprung from the fertile mind of Tim Schafer. Manny was an extremely well fleshed-out hero (as is often the case with LucasArts characters) who was obsessed with saving the soul of Mercedes 'Meche' Colomar. Never at a loss for words and surrounded by equally memorable characters, Manny is another character who deserved more exposure. Sadly, the recent closure of LucasArts means we're unlikely to ever see a new game.





ZOOL

WHEN SONIC CAME along in 1991, he not only helped catapult Sega to the top of the console pile (for at least a short while) but quickly established himself as a spunky new mascot for the company. Realising that there were few games on home computers that could match the speed or gameplay of *Sonic*, Gremlin Graphics went about creating its own videogame hero. That hero was Zool, a ninja from the 'Nth' dimension who quickly became Gremlin's mascot. Like Sonic he was extremely fast, delivering the sort of high-speed shenanigans that a lot of Amiga and Atari ST users simply weren't used to.

Gremlin took pains to not only ensure gamers knew that Zool wasn't actually an ant (as many reviewers of the time automatically assumed) but that its 'Nth' dimension ninja was pushed as aggressively as possible. As a result he appeared on a large number of systems, including the Amiga 1200 (where he was packaged with the newly-released computer) Game Boy, SNES, Mega Drive, Acorn Archimedes, PC and even an arcade release. Interestingly, Zool's adventure was better received on home computers compared to home consoles at the time, possibly due to systems like the Mega Drive and SNES having more established heroes by way of Sonic and Mario that did play better than in Gremlin's game.

Zool certainly wasn't the embarrassment that many made him out to be and the success of the original game resulted in a sequel called *Zool 2*, which not only improved on the core gameplay of the original but also added a female foil for Zool in the form of Zooz and a dog called Zoon. The sequel wasn't pushed like the original however, appearing on only a handful of formats and Zool, like many other before him, was consigned to videogame history.

ZOOL



FIRST APPEARANCE: ZOOL: NINJA FROM THE 'NTH' DIMENSION

» YEAR:	1992
» LIKEABILITY:	69
» NUMBER OF GAMES:	2
» POPULARITY:	65
» VERSATILITY:	45



PC KID

WE'RE NOT SURE why, but prehistoric characters show up regularly in videogames. While we've yet to see a caveman compete against dinosaurs (humans and dinosaurs never co-existed) we still enjoy their adventures, whether they're the primitive escapades of Joe & Mac or the rock-flinging adventures of Chuck Rock.

PC Kid, or Bonk as he's known in the US, wasn't initially created as a mascot for NEC's PC Engine as many think; he was actually created as a comic strip for *PC Engine Monthly*. As the strip grew in popularity, Hudson Soft and Red Company decided that he should star in his own game and charged Atlus with creating it.

Turned around in just three months, *PC Genjin* turned out to be a polished platformer that not only reviewed well, but proved to be a big hit with gamers. PC Kid was soon plastered across numerous PC Engine adverts, and his mascot status was assured… at least until he was replaced by the supposedly 'hipper' Zonk in 1992. He may have only had a short run as NEC's mascot, but PC Kid made the most of it and went on to star in several sequels. He even got ported to other systems, unusual for console mascots at the time.

Hudson Soft planned a comeback for PC Kid in 2010 called *Bonk: Brink Of Extinction*, which saw the aging mascot try to avoid a comet that threatened to destroy the Earth. After the devastating impact of the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami, the game was cancelled by Hudson Soft and the company ceased trading not long after.

PC KID



FIRST APPEARANCE: PC GENJIN

» YEAR:	1989
» LIKEABILITY:	81
» NUMBER OF GAMES:	7
» POPULARITY:	80
» VERSATILITY:	68



GAMING'S GREATEST UNDERDOG

FAITH

» FIRST APPEARANCE:	MIRROR'S EDGE
» YEAR:	2008
» LIKEABILITY:	50
» NUMBER OF GAMES:	2
» POPULARITY:	50
» VERSATILITY:	50

■ Considering the solid job Rhianna Pratchett did with the background of Lara Croft in Crystal Dynamics' *Tomb Raider*, it's disappointing that Faith didn't receive the same rich fleshing-out. It actually worked in Faith's favour though, as, combined with the distinctive first-person setting, it allowed the player to actually be Faith – experiencing every failed leap and exhilarating jump as she performed them. Here's hoping her recently-announced sequel sees her getting the attention she deserves.



PLOK

» FIRST APPEARANCE:	PLOK
» YEAR:	1993
» LIKEABILITY:	77
» NUMBER OF GAMES:	1
» POPULARITY:	68
» VERSATILITY:	46

■ It would appear that the fate of Plok rested with Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto. Last month Ste Pickford revealed to us how Shigeru Miyamoto had potentially big plans for Plok, only to turn his focus in-house and to a certain plumber. The end result, even without Miyamoto's help, was a fantastic platformer, but we can only dream at what might have been. At least Plok still lives on in our hearts thanks to the Pickford brothers' entertaining online comic strips.



RAZ

» FIRST APPEARANCE:	PSYCHONAUTS
» YEAR:	2005
» LIKEABILITY:	70
» NUMBER OF GAMES:	1
» POPULARITY:	68
» VERSATILITY:	60

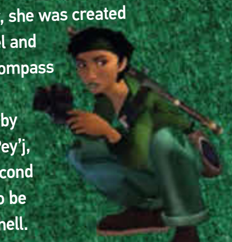
■ Okay, so this is the second Tim Schafer game we're covering here, but it's certainly not our fault that he creates highly engaging characters that then get criminally ignored by the videogaming masses. Ten-year-old Raz is a boy with psychic powers, psychic powers that Schafer and his team moulded masterfully into brilliant gameplay mechanics. Even without his slick abilities Raz still remains firmly in your memory, mainly due to his great design and witty dialogue.



JADE

» FIRST APPEARANCE:	BEYOND GOOD & EVIL
» YEAR:	2003
» LIKEABILITY:	84
» NUMBER OF GAMES:	1
» POPULARITY:	65
» VERSATILITY:	55

■ Jade was a character who proved that videogame women weren't just created to be rescued from castles or wear the flimsiest of clothing. Spunky and courageous with a keen eye for photography, she was created by *Rayman*'s Michel Ancel and boasted a strong moral compass and exceptional combat skills. Aided and abetted by the equally memorable Pey'j, it's a travesty that her second adventure still appears to be trapped in development hell.







Gaming's  Greatest Underdog



Alex Kidd might not have gone the distance as a mascot for Sega but he did for the Master System. Stuart Hunt looks back on the life and games of Sega's 8-bit underdog – or perhaps should that be undermonkey?

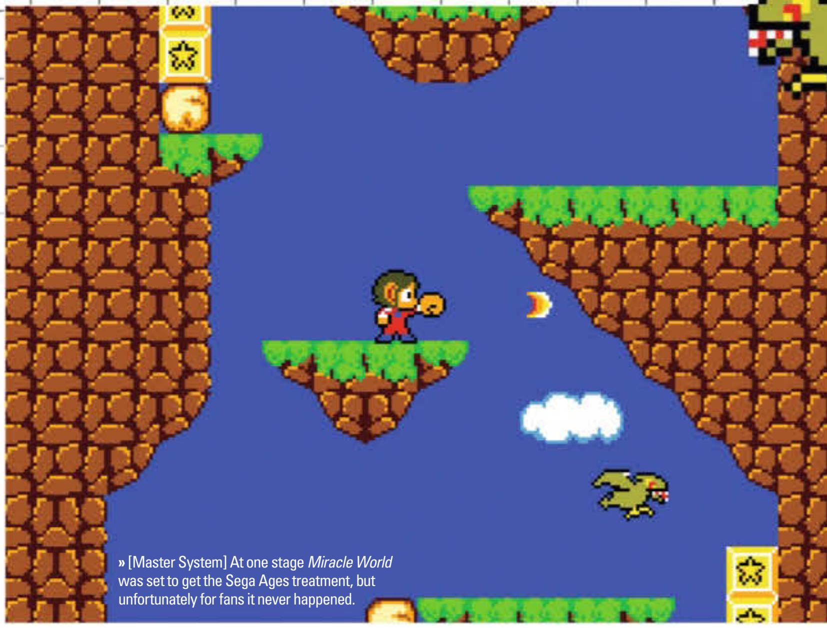
The Kameo Kidd

Alex has popped up in plenty of different Sega games over the years…



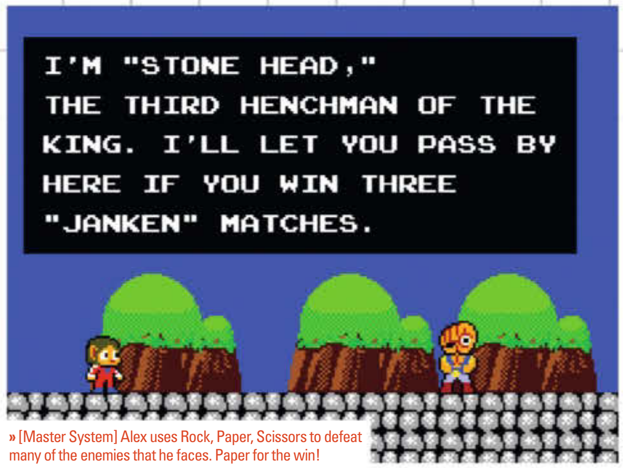
ALTERED BEAST

■ The names of Alex and girlfriend Stella are chiselled onto gravestones. Spooky prediction of Alex's death as Sega mascot or a knowing Sega poking fun?





» [Master System] At one stage *Miracle World* was set to get the Sega Ages treatment, but unfortunately for fans it never happened.

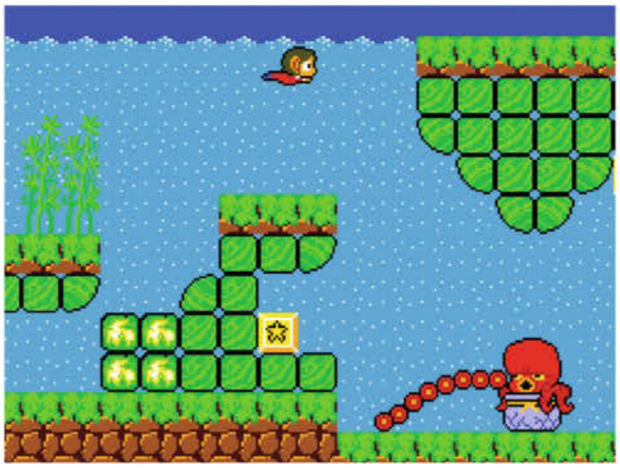


» [Master System] Alex uses Rock, Paper, Scissors to defeat many of the enemies that he faces. Paper for the win!

Though it took Sega three goes to finally settle on Sonic as its mascot, Opa-Opa and Alex Kidd, the characters that held the honour before him, are just as important to its history. Both symbolise Sega's growth as a developer during the Eighties: Opa serves as a great reminder of Sega's illustrious coin-op beginnings, and Alex its battle to find its place in the console market.

Opa was the star of the cutesy and colourful 1986 *Defender*-style shooter *Fantasy World* and is widely regarded as being Sega's first mascot character. A sentient spaceship with feet, wings and egg-shaped body, Opa may not have been ideal mascot material on reflection, but *Fantasy Zone*'s popularity in Japan, combined with the character's anthropomorphic look, did make him an understandable candidate for mainstay Sega hero at the time.

Opa's time being the apple of Sega's eye, though, was fairly brief. And though some have questioned if he was ever really an official mascot, there is strong evidence that suggests Sega favoured him in the Eighties. As well as appearing in four *Fantasy Zone* games inside the decade (six, and one unreleased game in the PC Engine-headed *Space Fantasy Zone*, in total), Opa had cameo appearances in a bunch of Sega titles, including *Teddy Boy*, *Zillion* and *Alex Kidd: The Lost Stars*.



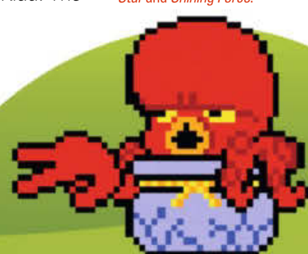
» [Master System] *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* remains Alex's most famous game. It was designed by Kotaro Hayashida, who later worked on *Phantasy Star* and *Shining Force*.

Despite Opa's coin-op success and sequels however, the landscape of popular gaming was changing thanks to Nintendo, the NES and its killer app *Super Mario Bros*. With Sega and its Sega Mark III console taking just a small slice of the domestic game market in Japan, Sega took the decision to launch the Mark III as the Sega Master System in the West and give it its own system-born platformer hero to attract gamers to the machine.

Alex Kidd was that hero and made his videogame debut in the 1986 platformer *Alex Kidd In Miracle World*. Designed by Kotaro Hayashida (using the pseudonym Ossale Kohta), Hayashida's Sega credits also include *Zillion*, *Woody Pop* and *Phantasy Star*, and it's the latter title that offers a hint as to what made *Miracle World* stand out from other platformers at the time.

"*Miracle World* is rough around the edges," says Kurt Kalata, head editor of retro gaming website Hardcore Gaming 101, "but it has a real 'epic adventure' feel that was missing from most platformers at the time. The money gathering, the hidden stuff, the map, the vehicles, the little bits of plot throughout. It's fairly advanced for a console title from 1986."

While most platformers followed the simple run-and-jump from left to right recipe, *Miracle World* featured strategy and RPG elements





KENSEIDEN

■ Another stone-based cameo – this one in the hack-and-slash SMS platformer *Kenseiden*. On the third stage Alex's face can be seen hidden in the cave walls.



SEGAGAGA

■ Alex's most memorable cameo was in *Segagaga*, where he appeared as a videogame store clerk lamenting his treatment by Sega following the arrival of the blue spiky one.



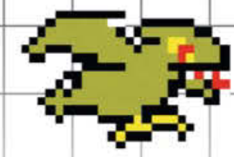
SHENMUE

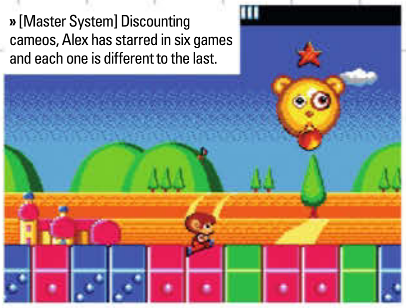
■ Alex collectable capsule toys appear in both *Shenmue* instalments. Other Sega personalities given the Kinder Egg treatment include Opa-Opa, Ristar and *Virtua Fighter* cast members.



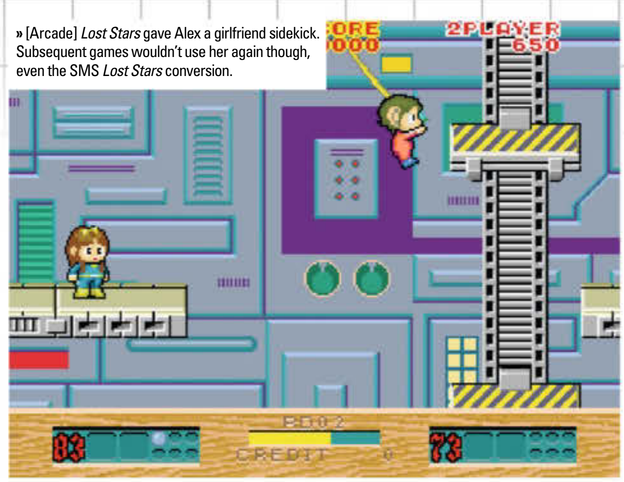
SEGA SUPERSTARS SERIES

■ More recently, Alex appeared in both *Sega Superstars Tennis* and the *Sega All-Stars Racing* series. In the latter he rides his red motorbike from *Miracle World*.





» [Master System] Discounting cameos, Alex has starred in six games and each one is different to the last.



» [Arcade] *Lost Stars* gave Alex a girlfriend sidekick. Subsequent games wouldn't use her again though, even the SMS *Lost Stars* conversion.

and its levels were all distinctively themed. Some of its more obvious adventure game elements included a world map, mini-games in the form of Janken (Rock-Paper-Scissors) and in-game currency (Baums) that could be collected and used by Alex to purchase useful gadgets and power-ups – from vehicles to powerful artefacts.

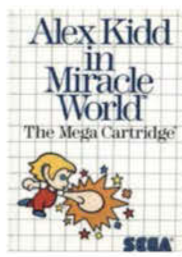
Miracle World's story was also fairly involved and made use of two pretty big adventure story clichés: a powerful tyrant seizing a peaceful land and a young boy learning that he's a lost prince. All of this simply helped to create a richer-feeling world that many gamers and platformer fans were drawn to.

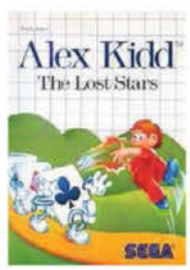
Miracle World remains the most popular and well-known game in the *Alex Kidd* series, and what undoubtedly helped it to achieve this status was Sega's decision to build it into Master System consoles, fusing it and Alex to the machine's legacy forever. And while *Miracle World* wasn't the first game integrated into Sega Master Systems (see Built To Thrill box out), it is the one that gamers seem to remember most vividly.

Alex Kidd: The Lost Stars was Alex's next game and was released just a few short weeks after *Miracle World*. Notable for being the only arcade game in the series, *Lost Stars* placed Alex in a more traditional style of platformer and gave him a girlfriend sidekick named Stella. The gameplay tasked the lovebirds – if playing co-op – with racing through its 12 stages to collect Zodiac signs, while negotiating obstacles and avoiding a very strange roster of enemies.

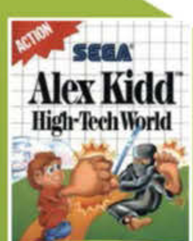
Its levels include a colourful toy world, a factory guarded by deadly robots and machinery, and an underwater stage that feels very much inspired by *Miracle World*'s submerged areas. *Lost Stars* also features a few cameos and nods to other Sega games – from penguins kicking ice cubes across the ice (*Pengo*), to a retired and bloated-looking Opa-Opa (a reference perhaps to Sega putting the character out to pasture).

"He was well known among the small handful of kids who had Sega Master Systems"
Kurt Kalata









One of the things that hurt Alex was Sega placing him in different styles of game, ostensibly viewing him as a sort of all-purpose hero rather than letting him grow a fan-base within the genre he was designed for.

Alex Kidd In High Tech World, which is a misleading title as it kind of gives the impression that it's cut from a similar cloth to *Miracle World*, was an action-RPG for the SMS that saw Alex on a quest to find a Sega amusement arcade.

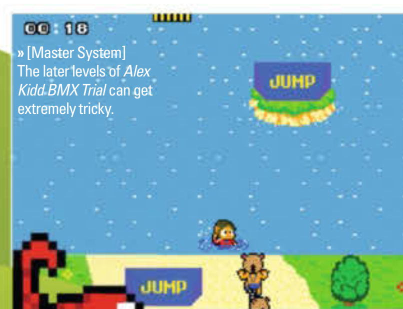
High Tech World was never released in Japan, as there it is known as *Anmitsu Hime* and isn't associated with the *Alex Kidd* series at all. Instead it's based on a Japanese manga and anime about a spirited young princess. The games are pretty much identical save for the necessary tweaks to the sprites, dialogue and story – rather than an amusement arcade the princess is on the hunt for a bakery.

The resulting meld results in a bizarre *Alex Kidd* adventure given that it's set in ancient Japan and stars a cast made up of samurais and ninjas. It also suffers from retcon, with Alex referring to one of the samurai characters in the game as his dad. *High Tech World* isn't Alex's best outing, but it does at least retain *Miracle World*'s adventure/platformer recipe – even if it get the parts and mixing wrong.

Released in Japan in 1987, *Alex Kidd BMX Trial* was an overhead racer designed to help sell the Mark III's paddle controller, a peripheral that came bundled with the game. *BMX Trail* saw Alex negotiating colourful obstacle courses, avoiding rival racers and performing jumps on a motocross cycle. It lacks excitement and the controls could be tighter, two issues that spell disaster for a racing game. The track design is the best thing about it, with nice wide stages that allow Alex to



» [Master System] *Alex Kidd BMX Trial* was never released outside of Japan. It's become quite sought after by collectors.



» [Master System] The later levels of *Alex Kidd BMX Trial* can get extremely tricky.

Rieko Kodama Talks

A brief chat with the artist behind Alex Kidd In Miracle World



Are you glad that Alex lives on in games like *Sega Super Star Tennis* and *Sonic All-Stars Racing Transformed*?
I am simply happy that he still is appearing in games and I really appreciate the fact that people remember him so long after the original game was launched.

How did you find working on the Mega Drive Alex Kidd compared to the Master System version?
We were able to use more colours, and parallax-scrolling was available, so we used that.

How would you like Alex Kidd to be remembered?
I have received a lot of comments from fans like "I played with my father when I was a kid! It is a good memory."

I would like Alex to be remembered as one of your friends you played with when you were a child.





venture off-road (albeit in a very limited sense) and not stick to a set route. It's a strange *Alex Kidd* title that feels more like a spin-off than a true *Alex Kidd* outing.

What could have been the game to really help catapult Alex to stardom in the US sadly turned out to be a 16-bit damp squib – one that most likely sounded the final death knell for his career with Sega. Released in Japan in 1989 and a launch game for the Genesis the following year, *Alex Kidd In The Enchanted Castle* was a late-to-arrive sequel to *Miracle World*. Expanding on the original story, it sees Alex on a mission to find the whereabouts of his dad King Thor, a quest that leads him to the colourful Paper-Rock-Scissors-obsessed planet of Paperock.

Enchanted Castle's gameplay is very similar to *Miracle World*'s. That is to say you punch things, you jump over things, you buy things, you drive things and you play Paper-Rock-Scissors with things. However, despite the extra power of the Mega Drive and a return to a genre that had worked for Alex, *Enchanted Castle* sadly failed to capture the considerable charm of its predecessor.

The biggest issues are that visuals barely look a step up from *Miracle World*, the controls feel even more slippy than they did in *Miracle World* and the stages just don't feel as fun or creative. It's not all doom and gloom though. Improvements are made in a few areas. Alex's move repertoire is expanded upon, certain coloured blocks could now be punched at enemies and purchased items were now stored in a handy inventory that Alex could dip into at any time.

Though it had been a bumpy ride for Alex up to this point, his final game did at least see him claw back some love and credibility in the enjoyable, if a bit short, *Alex Kidd In Shinobi World*. Released for the SMS in US and Europe, *Shinobi World* saw Alex gatecrash another Sega franchise and get to live out his final days in more conformable 8-bit surroundings. But it was a wonderful little swansong for Alex Kidd that almost never happened.

Shinobi World was originally going to be titled *Shinobi Kid*, and was to have no reference to the *Alex Kidd* series at all. The original game was also to feature a first boss named Mari-Oh (a play on *Shinobi* first boss Ken Oh) who was a thinly veiled parody of a certain Nintendo mascot. Sadly, he never made it into the finished game, but Alex did.

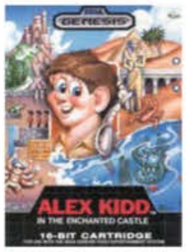
With its ingredients including cutesy versions of levels, weapons, music, enemies and bosses from *Shinobi*, *Alex Kidd In Shinobi World* is an entertaining little Sega mash-up and one of the better action games available for the SMS.

It would be fair to say that Alex Kidd never reached the videogame A-list thanks to him failing to make a splash in North America. There he was hurt by poor marketing (cover art for his games portrayed him as a gawky teenage boy) and the SMS also failing to take off.

"I knew about him as a kid, somehow," remembers Kurt. "He was well known among the small handful of kids that had Sega Master Systems. Anecdotally, there were only

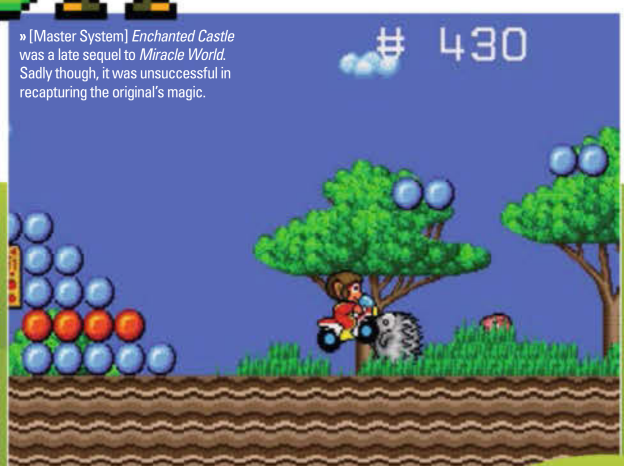


» [Master System] *High Tech World* was actually a re-skin of the Japanese game *Anmitsu Hime*. It was based on a manga and anime about a young princess.









» [Master System] *Enchanted Castle* was a late sequel to *Miracle World*. Sadly though, it was unsuccessful in recapturing the original's magic.

Anatomy of Alex Kidd

Discover what makes Sega's old mascot tick

EARLY ORIGINS

■ Alex is believed to have been based on the Monkey King from the classic Chinese novel *Journey To The West* – the same Monkey King that became the inspiration for the hero in the *Monkey* TV series from the Seventies

STREET CRED

■ Alex's anime look was played down outside of Japan, with Western cover and promotional art depicting him as a gawky teenager with about as much edge as a rubber ring. Naturally, this did nothing to help boost his cred in playgrounds.

GAME OF ALEX?

■ It's also believed that Alex's bright red jumpsuit could have inspired by the iconic yellow jumpsuit worn by martial arts legend Bruce Lee in his final film, *The Game Of Death*.



FISTS OF FURY

■ Alex has dedicated years of his young life to mastering the 'Shellcore' technique, a fictional martial art that allows him to enlarge his fists to effortlessly break rock.

FOOTWEAR

■ Alex is known for having poor footwear. His shoes are slippery and offer little stability. Not really the best feet tools for platformers. Maybe he should invest in some platform shoes? Sorry.



Built To Thrill

Alex Kidd In Miracle World wasn't the only game that lived inside Master Systems…

SNAIL MAZE



BUILT-INTO:
SMS model number – 3000

■ Unlocked by pressing UP and buttons 1 and 2 with no cartridge in the console, *Snail Maze* was a hidden game that plays exactly as it sounds. You must help a snail work through mazes and reach an exit within a time limit. As you progress the time limit gets tighter.

HANG-ON



BUILT-INTO: SMS model number – 3005-24

■ A big hit, so undoubtedly Sega was keen to make Yu Suzuki's *Hang-On* an incentive for consumers to purchase its console. The Master System port isn't that bad. It not perfect and does get repetitive, but it looks nice and the animation and controls are smooth enough.

MISSILE DEFENSE 3D



BUILT-INTO: SMS model number – 3005-C

■ *Missile Defense 3D* is a simple but entertaining lightgun game that does well to demo the potential of Sega's 3D glasses. Like *Missile Command*, you must protect a city from missile threats. The action takes place across three stages, and must shoot down the missiles before they reach and decimate their destination.

HANG-ON & SAFARI HUNT & SNAIL MAZE



BUILT-INTO: SMS model number – 3010-A

■ The ultimate SMS 1 variant is probably the 3010-A as it came with three built in games: *Snail Maze* (hidden) and *Hang-On* and *Safari Hunt* as a double-pack. The latter is a generic lightgun game to simply show off the SMS Light Phaser. It's basically Sega's *Duck Hunt*.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG



BUILT-INTO: Master System II variant

■ Once Sonic had become a platform superstar, Alex was left out on his big ear. Sega looked to blue hedgehog mania to help it sell its then last-gen system, and as part of the deal Alex had to give up his home. Admittedly though, it was a smart move.





» [Mega Drive] Alex's Mega Drive outing may have had more power, but it wasn't necessarily more fun to play.

> **"You can't talk about old games in Brazil without mentioning Alex Kidd"**
> Marcelo Barbosa

two other kids in my entire school that had one, so there probably weren't many. Other than that, I think most gamers only know him from *Enchanted Castle* on the Genesis, since it was a launch title for the system and was snagged by a lot of early adopters and featured in advertisements."

Though Alex failed to break North America, there were places where he found fans, namely those countries where the SMS was popular, such as Brazil.

Brazilian Marcelo Barbosa (aka MCB Remakes) has been working on an HD update of *Alex Kidd In Miracle World*. Raised and still living in Brazil, Marcelo shares his memories of Alex's life in his country, giving us a glimpse of an unfamiliar world to many gamers where Alex actually went some way to living up to his prince credentials.

"Alex Kidd was tremendously popular here," Marcelo tells us. "You can't talk about old games in Brazil without mentioning Alex Kidd. It wasn't unusual to see him on magazine covers and we always directly associated him with Sega until Sonic appeared on the scene."

The opposite of how things played out for Alex in North America, getting to Brazil before Nintendo gave Sega and its mascot a significant edge.

"Sega games were sold in Brazil since 1989 but Nintendo had only arrived here in 1993. For four years we had Sega ads everywhere and no (official) sign of Mario, NES, Super Nintendo or Game Boy. For political reasons Brazil was a paradise of obsolete technology – old cars, old computers, old anything-you-can-imagine. That started to change in the late Eighties and early Nineties. Dictatorship in Brazil was gone and our country became more receptive to foreign technology. So we were still playing our old Atari 2600 games and suddenly the Master System appeared on TV and in magazine advertisements. It was clearly new, different and much more advanced than all the gaming systems available in Brazil. Every kid wanted a Master System for Christmas in 1989."

For a long while officially licensed Nintendo products weren't available in Brazil. This led to many Brazilian Famiclones appearing after the Master System's release, with gamers keen to obtain more of these advanced looking



» [Master System] That boss may look happy, but he'll punish you if you're not careful.

Alex Kidd In HD World

We chat to Marcelo Barbosa about his progress in updating Alex's best adventure



Why did you decide to create an HD remake of *Alex Kidd In Miracle World*?
Alex Kidd HD is not exactly a remake; it's a ROM hack running in a sort of mutant Master System that is able to display images with four times more resolution. Aside from my new graphics, everything else is the original stuff created by Sega. Last year I read about an emulator called HiSMS that turns the SMS into this mutant console capable of displaying hi-res graphics. I chose *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* as it's a small, simple game that I'm very familiar with. Also, I never had a SMS but *Alex Kidd* was also the first post-Atari game that I really remember enjoying a lot – so nostalgia influenced me as well.

What has been the most challenging/rewarding part of the project so far?
Bugs on HiSMS do their best to make you give up, so the first challenge is to not turn crazy. The other two concern the graphics. I'm doing all the research I can to respect the original Japanese character designs, collecting all the *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* art I can find to help me with the designs for the more obscure characters. The final challenge has been the backgrounds because I'm definitely not good at drawing them. The most rewarding part is when HiSMS turns all confusing image files into a single, working ROM. Suddenly your drawings come alive, jumping and fighting inside this incredible Super Master System.

Do you plan to release the game once it is finished?
This is the most frustrating part of this project. People are much more interested in *Alex Kidd HD* than I could ever expect, but I can't release it because the game belongs to Sega and I don't want to get in trouble. The project is about 65 per cent complete and I'm facing it as a proof of concept, a showcase of HiSMS's capabilities. Many companies could easily create HD updates of their old games. I bet projects like these would be much cheaper than a full remake, especially if they still have their old assets around.



» [PC] The HD update of *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* is looking very nice indeed.



» [PC] It's currently unclear if Marcelo's project will ever have a full release.

videogames. As a result, Nintendo also found popularity in Brazil, although Mario became known as a mascot for something else.

"Mario became very popular in Brazil as well, but he was essentially a mascot of pirate games," explains Marcelo. "He had strong presence in gaming magazines but there were no posters or promotions showing him in actual stores. The first Brazilian Nintendo commercial (1993) is weird because it sort of assumes that people know who Mario is due to piracy. So in these first years I honestly believe that Alex Kidd was as popular as Mario – probably due to excellent, omnipresent marketing campaigns by Tec Toy (Brazilian company that made and sold licensed Sega products) and the lack of interest by Nintendo in the Brazilian market, that was until they realised that Sega/Tec Toy was making a lot of money here."

In most parts of the world Alex quickly became forgotten about once the Mega Drive was released and *Sonic The Hedgehog* cemented the machine's North American success story.

At one time though, Sega and Alex were both underdogs, and it's perhaps for this reason why many Sega fans seem to have affection for the character. Alex may not have made the mascot major leagues but he still left an impact on many gamers, especially early adopters of Sega. It's also worth noting that he's done pretty well to leave any sort of mark at all, given he hardly left behind the most impressive of gaming legacies: one classic platformer, a decent but little-known coin-op sequel, an action/RPG that was a re-skin of another game and an mediocre import racer, before finishing on a disappointing 16-bit debut and an fun action-platformer that owes much to another popular Sega franchise.

So why is Alex so fondly regarded by Sega fans? "He's a tragic underdog hero," answers Kurt. "Like that scene from *Segagaga* where you find him all washed up, working videogame retail; he was a fun character that was pushed aside for Sonic, who was cooler and hipper, and thus exponentially more popular. It's hard not to feel bad for him. Also, while I've known many people that hate *Miracle World* due to its slippery controls, I think it holds up well as one of the better games for the Master System. It was clearly trying to compete with *Super Mario Bros*, but rather than ripping it off, they created something wholly unique."



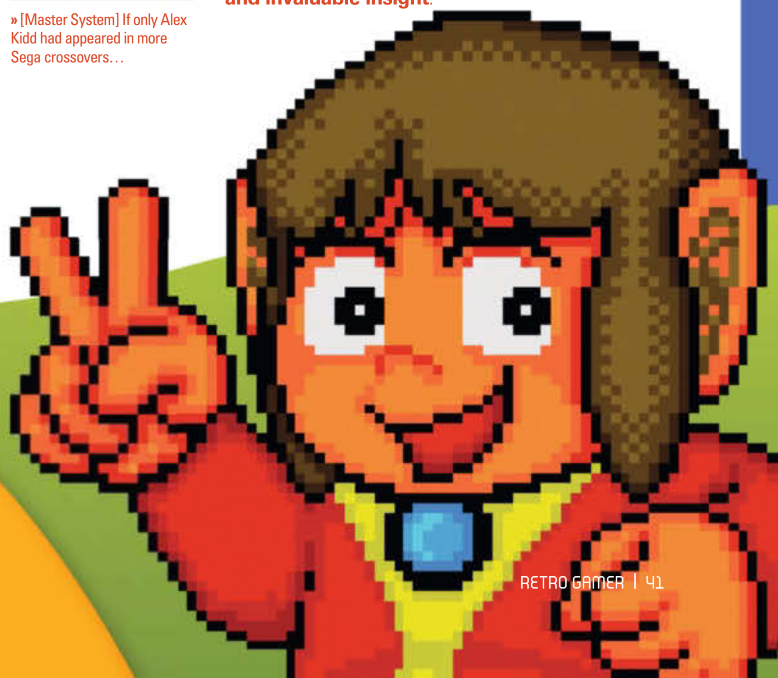
» [Master System] *Alex Kidd In Shinobi World* remains fantastic fun to play.

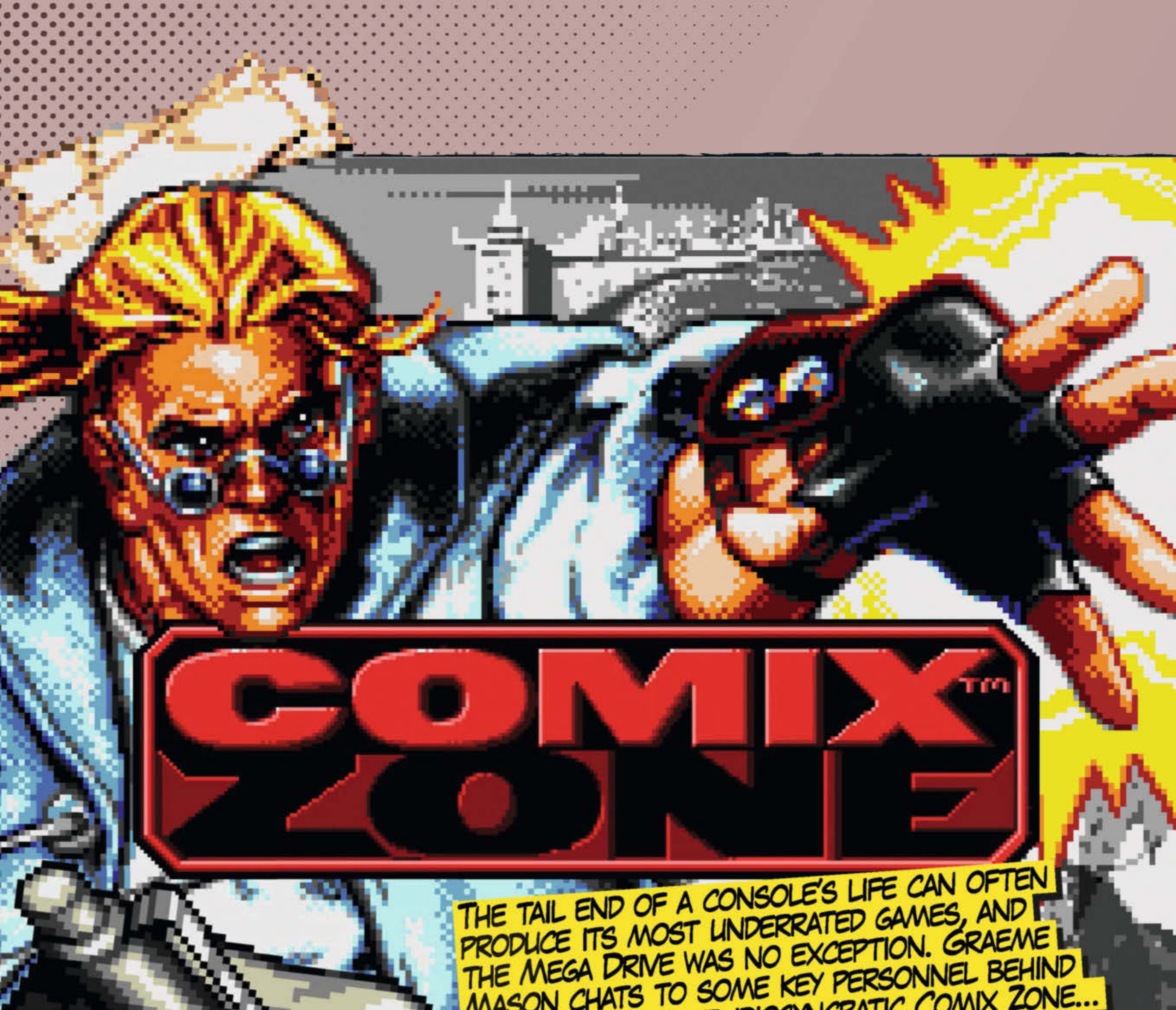


» [Master System] If only Alex Kidd had appeared in more Sega crossovers…

Special thanks to Kurt Kalata and Marcelo Barbosa for their help with this feature and invaluable insight.



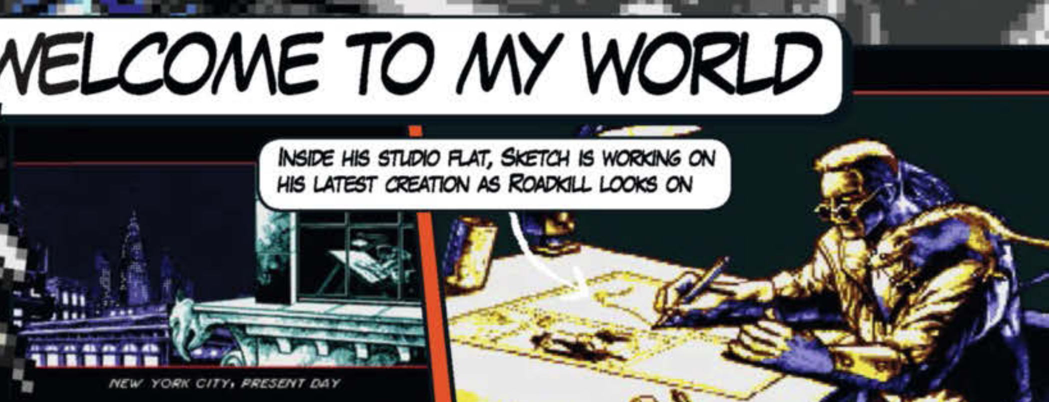




COMIX ZONE

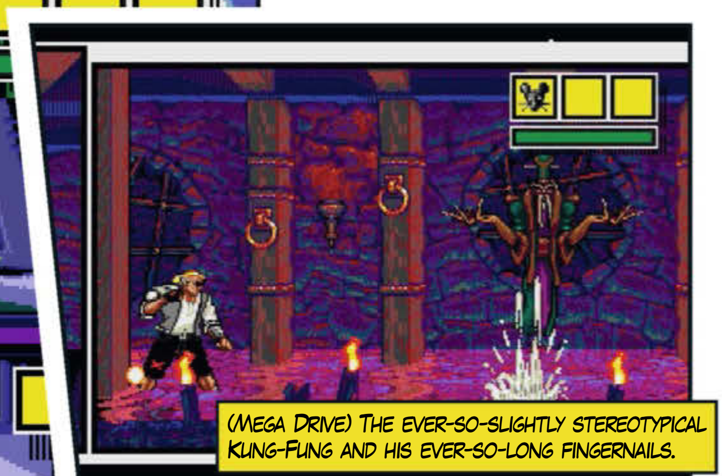
The tail end of a console's life can often produce its most underrated games, and the Mega Drive was no exception. Graeme Mason chats to some key personnel behind the innovative and idiosyncratic Comix Zone...

WELCOME TO MY WORLD





(Mega Drive) General Alissa Cyan offers help and guidance throughout Sketch's adventure.



(Mega Drive) The ever-so-slightly stereotypical Kung-Fung and his ever-so-long fingernails.

While there was indisputably still life in the old girl, by 1995 the Sega Mega Drive was starting to look a little worn around the edges. Sony had entered the games console market with its grey behemoth, the PlayStation, while Sega itself had unleashed its 32-bit successor to the Mega Drive, the Saturn. All told, it wasn't the best time to release a new Mega Drive game, even one as exceptional and original as *Comix Zone*. Yet actually the idea for the game had originated way back in 1992, when Sega Technical Institute (STI) designer Peter Morawiec, while working with Team Sonic on *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* and *Sonic Spinball*, created a concept video for an intriguing idea he had. "I grew up in Czechoslovakia and loved comic books when I could get them," says Peter, "although it was mostly European fare such as *Asterix* and *Tintin*." After emigrating to the United States in 1989, Peter suddenly found himself surrounded by many avid comic book fans. "I ended up getting introduced to all the major franchises and it was at that time that inspiration struck." That inspiration was to create a videogame around the tale of a comic book artist, trapped within the weird alternate dimension of his own comic, complete with a gameplay mechanic that saw the player progressing through a set of comic book panels. It was a highly visual idea, and one that the newly-arrived Czechoslovakian lad, not entirely fluent in English, didn't fancy describing to a room full of Sega executives.

"I WANTED TO MAKE A BEAT-'EM-UP ACTION GAME WITH A STRONG SENSE OF ADVENTURE"

Peter Morawiec, designer



Peter swiftly realised that he needed to visualise his concept if he was to stand a chance of getting the idea green lit. Enlisting the help of his trusty Commodore Amiga, he created *Joe Pencil Trapped In The Comix Zone*, the tale of an angular artist ensnared in his own comic book. "I wanted to make a beat-'em-up action game with a strong sense of adventure and as you can see from the concept video, while the character design changed, the overall premise and mechanics remained fairly intact." Indeed, the plot to the final game would echo the original concept in many ways: the player took control of Sketch Turner, a comic book artist transported into the pages of his own creation by super-villain Mortus. Sketch must travel within the confines of individual comic book frames, fighting off the nefarious mutant army and solving traps, often with assistance from his trusty companion – a pet rat charmingly called Roadkill. The game would not only require skilful coding and compression, but also some persuasion if it were to pass the Sega board.

"STI was presenting a handful of concepts to Sega's executives," explains Peter, "and it was a fairly formal setting. So as I wasn't super-fluent in English, I used the video to do most of the talking. Luckily Sega's then-president, Tom Kalinske, liked it very much." Someone else who liked the idea was Roger Hector, vice-president of the STI. "Peter had put together what I thought was an excellent video demo and I absolutely *loved* it!" says Roger enthusiastically.

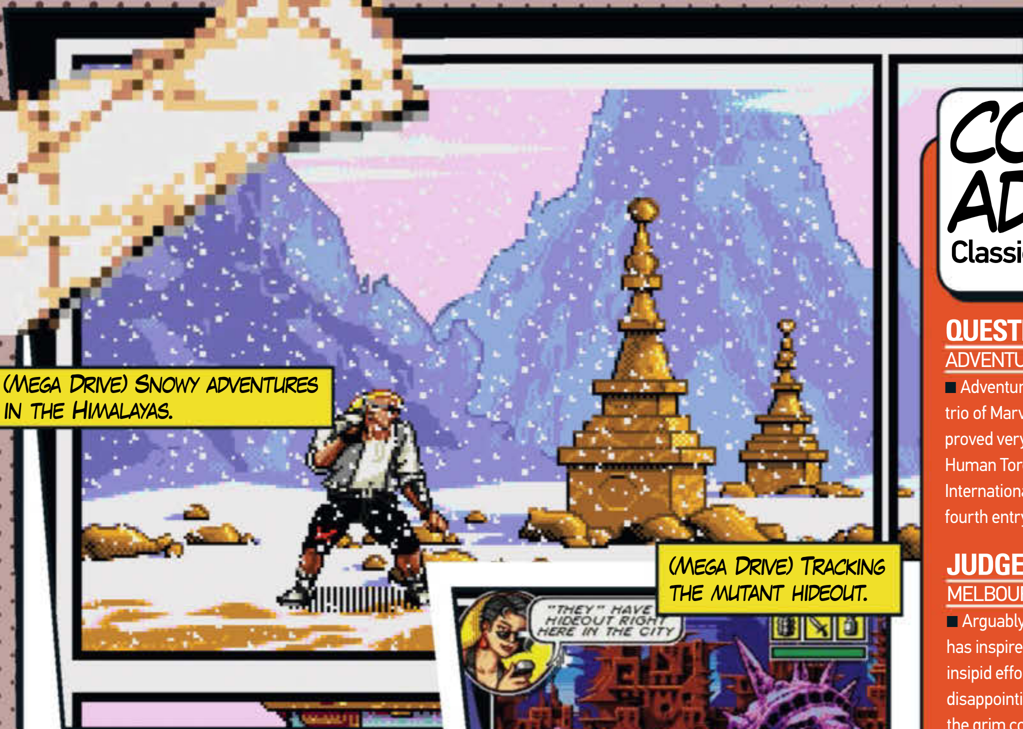


Suddenly a bolt of lightning strikes and an arm jumps out of the page and grabs Sketch

Mortus, Sketch's master villain is in our world! And he's not happy!

Unfortunately for Sketch, Mortus has a nefarious plan

And the artist is transported into the world of Comix Zone



(MEGA DRIVE) SNOWY ADVENTURES IN THE HIMALAYAS.



(MEGA DRIVE) TRACKING THE MUTANT HIDEOUT.

"He did a great job of mocking up the visual gameplay in the video and his passion and clarity of vision was undeniable. I put it on our list of 'good ideas to come back to when we have a chance.'"

Unfortunately that chance did not arise for some time. The Sega Technical Institute famously incorporated Sonic Team, the designers and programmers behind the iconic *Sonic The Hedgehog* series. While these games were under development, there was little scope for other projects. "But we wanted to make it happen," continues Roger, "and I loved *Comix Zone*'s basic concept for its uniqueness and sharp visual style. Using a comic book page gave a natural organisation to visually suggest progress and create strategy in the game." Working at STI was British programmer Adrian Stephens, who had previously collaborated with Roger Hector on the Disney game *Stunt Island*. "Roger asked me to join him at STI to start working on the next generation of Sega consoles," remembers Adrian, "but after I arrived it turned out the new console would not be available to start work on for over a year. So I wanted to work on a Genesis title to keep myself occupied until then." Roger suggested Adrian speak to a certain young Czechoslovakian designer and have a look at his game concept video. "I loved it!" says Adrian, echoing Roger's own reaction. "And it immediately reminded me of the music video *Take On Me* by A-ha." Peter himself acknowledges the influence the video had on *Comix Zone*, citing it as a 'strong reference point'.

As technical director of the STI, Adrian programmed all aspects of *Comix Zone* and wrote the tools for extracting sprites and background graphics. "The first thing I worked on was a way to swap graphics in and out of video memory on the fly," recalls Adrian, "speculatively decompressing parts as it went. This was important for the visual style of the game which didn't rely on repeating tiles." Not wishing to be restricted by a limited colour palette, Adrian also developed a system of speedily switching colours during the horizontal sync, allowing for impressive effects such as rippling water. "But it was hard work to get the timing right for it to look good." he grimaces. And of course, these being the last days of the cartridge-based games console (unless you were Nintendo), memory was always an issue. "Actually, a lot of our technical development was just about how we could cram everything into 16 megabits," says Adrian, "so everything was heavily compressed although the limited RAM – 64k – meant not much could be decompressed at a time." Designer Peter Morawiec was involved all the way through



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **DEVELOPER:** SEGA TECHNICAL INSTITUTE
- » **RELEASED:** 1995
- » **PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE, PC
- » **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP

COMIC BOOK ADAPTATIONS

Classic paper heroes who went digital

QUESTPROBE TRILOGY

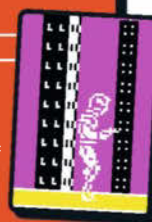
ADVENTURE INTERNATIONAL, 1984



■ Adventure games may not be in vogue today, but back in 1984 this trio of Marvel-themed graphic text adventures from Scott Adams proved very popular. Featuring Spider-Man, The Hulk and double act Human Torch and Thing, their success could not prevent Adventure International's bankruptcy a year later. This unfortunately meant a fourth entry, based around the X-Men, never saw the light of day.

JUDGE DREDD

MELBOURNE HOUSE, 1986



■ Arguably the UK's most famous comic character, Judge Dredd has inspired several videogames, starting with this somewhat insipid effort from Melbourne House. Oft-delayed and ultimately disappointing, the game still managed to portray many elements of the grim comic with accuracy such as Dredd's Lawgiver boasting alternate firing options.

BATMAN: THE CAPED CRUSADER

OCEAN, 1988



■ Programmer Jon Ritman and Ocean had already given us a slightly portly version of Batman in 1986, although it's arguable whether, despite the authentic front cover, it was based on the comic or the Sixties TV show. However, this superb 1988 update featuring *Comix Zone*-like comic book panels and speech bubbles left you in no doubt as to its origins.

X-MEN

KONAMI, 1992



■ Not to be confused with *X-Men: Children Of The Atom*, which was released two years later by Capcom, this Konami arcade machine from 1992 saw the player take control of one of the titular mutants against the minions and might of the evil Magneto. It wasn't the most complex of games, but with each character boasting individual powers, was certainly fun to play.

SAM & MAX HIT THE ROAD

LUCASARTS, 1993



■ Released by indie publisher Fishwrap Productions in 1987, Steve Purcell's *Sam & Max: Freelance Police*, the tale of an anthropomorphic dog and rabbit detective agency, quickly became a cult hit amongst comic book fans. Six years later, LucasArts (for whom Purcell was now working) gave its creator the chance to develop a game using *Maniac Mansion*'s legendary SCUMM engine.

ROBOCOP VS THE TERMINATOR

VIRGIN, 1994



■ Based on the Frank Miller crossover comic by Dark Horse, Virgin returned to comic-book adaptations with this dark and violent arcade platformer based on David Perry's Mega Drive engine. Unable to use any actual material from the comic, programmer John Botti and designer Tim Williams studied one of their favourite games, *Contra III*, to give the game its playable sheen.

SPIDER-MAN AND VENOM: MAXIMUM CARNAGE

LJN/ACCLAIM, 1994



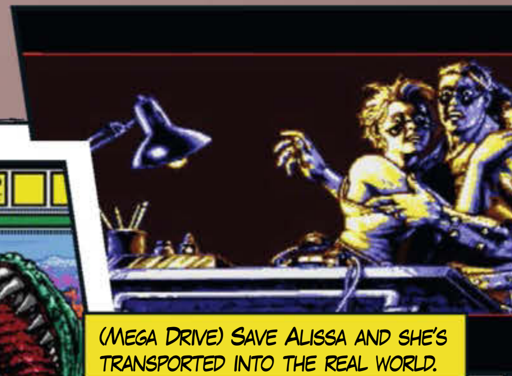
■ Spider-Man's alien alter ego, Venom, had become a popular character since his introduction in the 1984 *Secret Wars* comic book miniseries. It took ten years for this popularity to be translated into videogame form with this fun brawler on the SNES and Mega Drive; think *Streets Of Rage 2* with web-slinging and wall-climbing.



(MEGA DRIVE) SKETCH ACROBATICALLY LEAPS BETWEEN THE PANELS.



(MEGA DRIVE) SKETCH IS RARELY SHORT OF AN AMUSING QUIP.



(MEGA DRIVE) SAVE ALISSA AND SHE'S TRANSPORTED INTO THE REAL WORLD.

development. "I felt it was my baby and tried to contribute as much as possible: character designs, level layouts, gameplay feature design and even some AI scripting," he says, also recalling the restrictions of the cartridge. "I initially envisioned much more variety within the panels of the comic book, but we ultimately had to curtail those ambitions due to memory limitations. As a result, there are a number of repeating tile graphics throughout each page." And being a fan of the Amiga demo scene, Peter was keen to incorporate considerable graphical pizazz to highlight the comic book environment. "We tried to squeeze in as many effects as possible," he says, highlighting in particular the impressive writing hand on the boot-up screen and the rolling page graphic, noting "Adrian did wonders to achieve that page curl."

Technical issues and memory restrictions aside, there was another problem during the development of *Comix Zone* that, while not entirely 'unexpected', could have caused some major issues. "A big issue came late in the process when Adrian had to relocate to southern California and finish the game away from STI," remembers Roger Hector, "but he miraculously made it work out." The reason for such a move? We'll let Adrian himself explain. "The reason for the move wasn't actually so sudden," he smiles, "as there was nine months warning! My then-girlfriend, and now wife, was having our baby and our long-distance relationship needed to become a little shorter!" Adrian managed to postpone the move for as long as he could, meaning it ultimately had little effect on the development of *Comix Zone* apart from perhaps a little loss of focus when it came to the final round of testing. And more importantly, the coder made it to Santa Monica the day before his girlfriend gave birth.

"I AM QUITE SURE IT WOULD HAVE DONE MUCH BETTER HAD IT BEEN RELEASED [EARLIER]" Roger Hector



Inevitably, *Comix Zone* clearly suffered because of its elongated development schedule. "We secured Sega's sign-off in late 1992," recalls Peter, "but couldn't begin development until after completing *Sonic Spinball* in early 1994." As if this was not delay enough, when marketing and quality control deemed *Comix Zone* to be too short, development slipped into 1995 as the team tweaked the difficulty level. "The game's difficulty has always been a gripe of mine," bemoans Peter, "as while many gamers seemed to love that aspect of the game, I always felt it prevented more people from experiencing it fully. A save feature would have helped, but it was considered an expensive luxury back then. It was just a fairly long and challenging project development-wise." And speaking of deficiencies in the game, Peter recalls struggling to wrestle all the story elements together. "I remember getting stumped with the script as it unfolded throughout the levels. I had all the locations and individual features in my head but struggled to link it all together. It was all rather paper-thin," he jokes before adding: "In retrospect we probably should have hired a writer to help with the speech bubbles at least – but this wasn't the norm back then."

Sales of *Comix Zone* were good, but not stellar. Would it have succeeded more at the beginning of the Mega Drive's life? "I am quite sure it would have done much better had it been released then," says Roger Hector, who remained a supporter and driving force behind the game right until the end. "At the beginning of a console's life is when new and unlicensed ideas could be tried and do very well. When a platform is winding down, it isn't such a good time." Yet despite their reservations, all who were involved on *Comix Zone* have very fond memories of Sketch's adventures. "I was very happy that, despite everything, the game stayed true to its original concept – and was fun," says Roger. Lead programmer Adrian Stephens agrees. "I felt we'd achieved what we'd set out to and it was as technically good as we could make it. Response to the game was great, but we were very aware if it had been released even a year earlier, it might have achieved much more financial success. But it was a great experience nonetheless."

Comix Zone turned out to be not just a swansong for the Mega Drive, but also the Sega Technical Institute itself. "STI had created a satellite office for Peter and I in Burbank where we worked on a Saturn *Sonic* game for a while," says Adrian. One day, they received a call from Roger Hector telling them he'd been let go by Sega. "We saw the writing on the wall and rather than waiting for the inevitable, Peter and I voluntarily left to start up our own company." But despite this sad end to the story of *Comix Zone*, for him personally, producer Roger Hector has nothing but praise for the game itself. "Comix Zone was a hidden jewel, a strong concept from start to finish and the team did a brilliant job of execution. Of the 100-plus games I've been involved with, it remains to this day one of my favourites."

Our thanks to Peter Morawiec, Roger Hector, Adrian Stephens and Howard Drossin for their time.

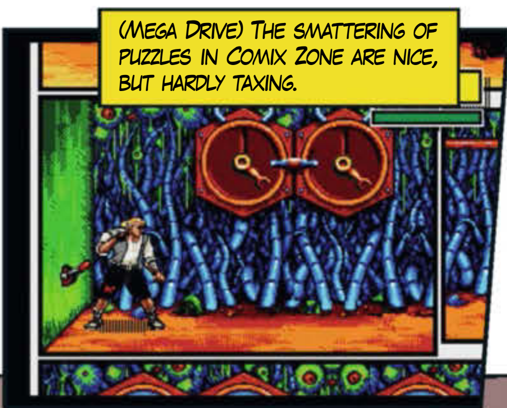
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2 (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1992

KID CHAMELEON
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1992

THE OOZE
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1995



(MEGA DRIVE) THE SMATTERING OF PUZZLES IN COMIX ZONE ARE NICE, BUT HARDLY TAXING.

THE SOUND OF COMIX ZONE



Musical Director at the Sega Technical Institute was Howard Drossin, who created the music and sound effects for all of the new games made there. "I think it was a pretty brief conversation that I had with Peter, and it turned out that we were both thinking the same thing for *Comix Zone*: pop-based grunge rock." As well as providing the music and sound to the game, Howard also contributed the voice of Sketch and the Elvis-esque "Sega" on its logo screen. And when it was suggested that he create a six-track CD soundtrack to go with the PAL release he jumped at it. "I put the band together by calling a few friends I knew in LA. It was an unusual thing to do in those days and I thought it was really cool that Sega allotted budget for it." Howard named his band Roadkill, after Sketch's pet rat, and arranged some of the music in the game. "For me it still ranks as one of my favourite projects. I'm proud of what I was able to get out of the chip!"

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come



INFO

» **Featured System:** PS2
» **Year:** 2005
» **Publisher:** Konami
» **Developer:** In-house
» **Key People:** Hideo Kojima (director), Yoji Shinkawa (character designer), Harry Gregson-Williams (composer)

GO DEEPER

» ***Metal Gear Solid 3* is one of the few PS2 games to feature downloadable content, letting players add camouflage options to their inventory.**

» **Upon the game's reveal at E3 2003, Kojima referenced *GTA: Vice City* and showed Snake's failed attempt to steal a motorbike in a scene that didn't make the game.**



» [PS3] The final fight with The Boss is a home run for Kojima in every single sense.

38. METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER

Hideo Kojima's greatest game to date plunged Snake into a jungle at the height of the Cold War, transforming the dynamic of his fan-favourite stealth series…

THE BACKGROUND

One main factor would determine the jungle setting of *Metal Gear Solid 3*: series creator Hideo Kojima felt like he could accomplish such an environment on PS2 where he couldn't before. Kojima and his team visited rainforests to research this backdrop; composer Harry Gregson-Williams was pleased, since during interviews for *MGS2* he jokingly mentioned he'd return to the series if it was set in the jungle – by coincidence, Kojima already had the setting in mind.

Kojima would bring Snake back in *MGS3* after a lot of players complained about Raiden in its predecessor, while the director also noted criticisms of the length of *Sons Of Liberty* in making *MGS3*. It was only later revealed that this Snake would in fact be Big Boss, villain from the first *Metal Gear* and the character cloned to create Solid Snake, in an instalment set many years before the other games.

The camera was a tricky issue for Kojima – at first he wanted consistency across the three titles, so he opted for the classic top-down view in *MGS3*'s original release. However, when the time came to make *MGS3: Subsistence*, a 2006 enhanced version of *Snake Eater*, he included a new third-person camera that was the final stretch towards making it a timeless experience. *Subsistence* would also add a multiplayer mode that found a limited audience.

THE GAME

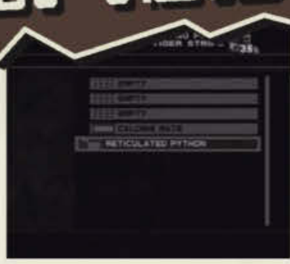
If a sequel ever felt like a reaction to the reception of its predecessor, it's *Metal Gear Solid 3*. *Metal Gear Solid 2* was accused of being philosophically bloated, overburdened with baffling cut-scenes and for misfiring completely by replacing its iconic main character with a whiny rookie, the much-maligned blonde child soldier mess Raiden. *Metal Gear Solid 3*'s jungle setting is the purest iteration of Kojima's experiments with stealth-based gameplay, allowing players to daub Snake in camouflage and creep through raw, wild scenery, while having to maintain Snake's well-being by keeping his

Things of note



This... is the end

The End boss fight is very smart, as you search for the ageing sniper's heavy breathing with a directional microphone. Changing the clock on the PS2 can make him die of old age.



Subsistence>Snake Eater

The Subsistence release of *MGS3* came with both a new camera and re-releases of *Metal Gear* and *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake* on MSX, and is availanble in the *MGS HD Collection*.



Starsailor, Stellastarr

Kojima ended up choosing Starsailor's *Way To Fall* to close out *Snake Eater* by accident. "I think that life is improved by these little accidents," Kojima recalled on his blog.



Young Ocelot

A young Revolver Ocelot's appearance in *MGS3* is obviously designed for the delight of fans – that this veteran villain was once a petulant soldier who lacked panache in combat.



The Bond Opening

The setting and the fact that Snake is a spy tie into a loose *Bond* theme in *MGS3*, underlined by the opening credits, which combine an OTT *Bond*-like theme tune with imagery of snakes.



» [PS3] The jungle imagery is employed to maximum effect throughout the story.



» [PS3] The Sorrow forces players to meet the spirits of all those they have killed.



» [PS3] Being chased out of the military base is a thrilling on-rails shooter section.

What the press thought



games™
Score: 8/10
"While certain recent games handle storytelling better than this, there remains a certain charm and magic about *Snake Eater* that just can't be found in titles without Kojima's Midas touch. It's a game that nobody else would dare make and that works for and against it."

body injury free and his stomach full of anything they can scrounge around the world.

MGS3's range of ideas is an extraordinary contrast to the five hours of bomb freezing in *MGS2* – set pieces in abundance, a number of astonishing boss fights and a genuinely engaging story colour an intelligently crafted 15+ hour journey.

Boss fights, as ever, form the crux of the way that narrative plays out. Of the members of Cobra Unit, individually created around a single emotion, the best three encounters are with The End, The Sorrow and The Boss. The End is a breathtakingly tense sniper fight with a dying old soldier that can last anywhere between five minutes and many hours – lose track of him and Snake can even be taken hostage by The End and wake up in prison. The Sorrow is a passive encounter where players have to walk down a river populated by the ghosts of every soldier Snake has killed up until that point, an ingenious pacing turn that shines a rare morality on the player's actions.

Then there's Volgin, armed with electric powers, a nuclear-powered tank called the Shagohod and aggressive sexual tendencies, who more or less fulfils the traditional role of a main *MGS* villain, with a terrific three-part fight that incorporates a brilliant on-rails chase sequence as well. Yet it's the inevitable battle with The Boss, Snake's mentor who betrays him and defects early in the story, that defies the traditional role of a boss fight and therefore is the most interesting part of *Snake Eater*, both in characterisation and the way the fight is presented. The Boss is portrayed as an enemy throughout *MGS3*, though not unambiguously, a soldier with conviction in her actions that a conflicted Snake knows he must kill.



Ultimately, the demise of The Boss, who understands the politics of war far better than Snake does, is part of the gut-wrenching twist finale of *MGS3* that turns the entire story on its head, a climax that is easily among the very best ever created for a videogame. Snake's notions of loyalty and patriotism are soured forever by the events and revelations that occur – and you too, as a player, leave *MGS3* with a feeling of heartbreak, as Kojima cleverly ties together a tale that's far sharper than we're used to from the director.

And there's the jungle. The sound of animals in the distance, leaves rustling with nearby snakes and the future Big Boss lying in a pit of mud, trying to avoid detection. These tense encounters, in a distinctive world ambitiously realised by Konami, are the foundation of the eccentric magic in *MGS3*.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

Kojima does make it very easy for people to criticise his storytelling. His games tend to have an over-reliance on cut-scenes, the lengths of which are at times self-indulgent, while his skill with characterisation is often buried within concepts that nobody cares about, the likes of which spoiled *MGS2* and *MGS4*. *Snake Eater*, however, illustrates that Kojima is a better storyteller than anyone else in his field when everything lines up, merging narrative and game design in ways that can have powerful emotional effects on the player.

Metal Gear Solid 3 stands clear of the rest of Kojima's bonkers saga, and it's quite obviously better for it. No burden to continue the story down the line (though he has), no encroaching mythology from previous games – a self-contained, intelligently-created summation of everything Kojima excels at as a designer and a storyteller.



KILLER INSTINCT

Like their Xbox One namesake, the Killer Instinct coin-ops were state of the art fighters. Rory Milne talks killer combos with ex-Rare developers Chris Tilston and Kevin Bayliss and Double Helix Games' Mike Willette



» [Arcade] A well-aimed Ice Lance gives Glacius the upper hand against *KI*'s Cinder.

1994's *Killer Instinct* saw Chris Stamper back working on coin-op hardware, much as he had done at the start of his career. By way of contrast, *Killer Instinct* marked Rare new-boy Chris Tilston's first exposure to arcade development. "*KI* was the first game I worked on professionally and also took a lead role in," recalls Chris. "My main responsibilities were leading up the design side – characters, moves, stories, implementing the gameplay and programming all of the moves for the players and some AI for the characters. Kevin Bayliss designed the look of the fighters, although we both came up with some of the characters' concepts."

Kevin Bayliss was an experienced games artist by the time he started work on *KI*, having joined Rare in 1987. "*Killer Instinct* was one of the first games that was developed during the 'dawn of a new era' at Rare – alongside *Donkey Kong Country* – when we moved into the 3D graphics generation to create realistic looking sprites," Kevin remembers. "Together with Chris Tilston and Mark Betteridge – and Ken Lobb from Nintendo – I helped devise a system for the general moves of the characters." Kevin also remembers going shopping with Tim Stamper, "We went to a company that specialised in supplying 3D graphics systems for large companies, for advertising etc. We chose PowerAnimator, which evolved into Maya, as it seemed to produce the best looking results. I worked on all kinds of 'fighting game' character ideas in 3D, this was quite a while before we started on *DKC* or created a demo for it. In fact, the earliest 3D graphics that I remember using PowerAnimator for were for the *Battletoads* coin-op."



» [SNES] *Killer Instinct* marked the 'dawn of a new era' at Rare – alongside *Donkey Kong Country*.

Battletoads wasn't the coin-op hit that *KI* would be, but to be fair, it wasn't developed for bespoke hardware or built using advanced tech. "The arcade board that Chris Stamper designed for *KI* was custom made – including a hard drive unit, which hadn't been used before. Compared to today they were very primitive but it enabled us to do some impressive things," recalls Chris. "Although physically the motion-capture suit was truly dreadful – fixed wires connected to a sweaty suit – it was cutting edge for its time and technically very impressive."

Kevin was largely responsible for *KI*'s motion-capture and for wearing that suit. "I beta-tested the software and system to capture the animation generated by a makeshift suit that we made ourselves. There were also one or two others that tried their hand at acting out moves. Louise Stamper got suited up for some of Orchid's animation so that she walked like a lady for the cut-scenes. Ha! – I even remember 'attempting' to walk like a woman wearing high heels in the suit, but it looked a little dodgy to say the least!" laughs Kevin. "I was very much into martial arts at that time, and so devised all the standard moves. These were the token weak, medium, strong moves found in most fighting games since *Street Fighter*."



» [Arcade] The *Battletoads* coin-op wasn't the arcade hit that its successor *Killer Instinct* would be.



> **"I even remember 'attempting' to walk like a woman wearing high heels"**
> Kevin Bayliss

Chris picks up the story, "After Kevin animated the moves he handed them off to me, Mark programmed the engine to enable me to put the moves in the game and then I programmed the combat system, which was designed by myself and Ken. Ken hit on the initial idea of having combos and the autodouble move – where one move would hit twice and give you the time to setup a linking move, which would continue the combo."

These co-ordinated efforts and use of innovative tech revolved around a carefully considered character roster. "There were loads of designs that we had for characters," Kevin notes, "but the ones that made it into the game were those that gave enough visual variety and took advantage of the effects Maya could produce. No one had seen the effects used in movies such as *Terminator 2* in videogames; by using those elements Glacius and Cinder were born. We added creatures like Riptor and the robotic knight Fulgore. We wanted a character that would fight in a similar way to Fulgore so we decided to create a modern version of Sabrewulf. There was no real connection to the original Spectrum hero, apart from the name." Chris agrees about Sabrewulf, "I think we wanted



» [Arcade] A perfectly timed Sabrespin catches Spinal unaware as claws meet skull in *Killer Instinct*.



» [Arcade] Fulgore's powerful Cyberdash move gets the better of *KI*'s TJ Combo.


» [Arcade] The warlord boss of *KI*, Eyedol, sends Sabrewulf flying with just one blow.

to include a werewolf character just because it looked good and would feel cool to play. I hate to admit it but linking it in to the old stuff was an afterthought."

The diverse nature of this cast required an elaborate backstory, as Kevin explains: "We started to look at developing a story that would bring all the characters together. Ken was a great influence and spent a lot of time over in the UK with us while we put the game together. We worked on the stories, the ideas for the cut-scenes and endings as a team. We all had fighting games in our hearts, the development block we created *KI* in was buzzing!"

Chris remembers being less enthusiastic about the game's chances of success, though, given the fate met by Rare's previous coin-op brawler, "I think no one expected *KI* to be a hit – certainly after *Battletoads* had bombed badly in the arcades. It was a bit of a punt and no one really expected anything from it."

Chris needn't have worried; the impact *Killer Instinct* had on the arcades of the mid-Nineties was akin to a bolt of lightning. It upstaged the competition with a booming sound system, imposing cabinet, exhilarating gameplay and larger than life fighters. "The graphics brought people in," Chris reasons, "the characters engaged people – they hadn't really seen a mix of fighters like this before. The gameplay was perfect for arcades and it allowed players to show off. Finally, the music was really contemporary and that played a big part in the success of the game."

KI's attract screen also teased an exclusive port for Nintendo's forthcoming console, but following the coin-op's release this was abandoned. "Originally we went straight onto the N64 version but halfway through, when the N64 was delayed, it seemed like a good opportunity to get another version out of the door, which is how *KI2* came about," Chris clarifies.

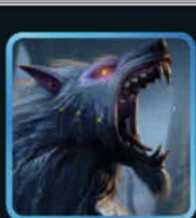
Before the sequel, however, Chris and Kevin worked on *KI* ports for Nintendo's existing consoles. "Terrible ones," remarks Chris, referring to memories of squeezing the coin-op into a SNES. "You start out with moves that have 20 frames of animation and come down to five frames. You think you're doing a great job hacking this game into such a small limit only to be reminded when you look at the arcade machine how warped it's becoming." Kevin has similar recollections of designing the Game Boy version, "It was a real challenge. We didn't want to re-draw everything and lose the look of the game – it would simply not have looked anything like *KI*. So we used our software to get the most out of

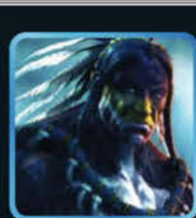
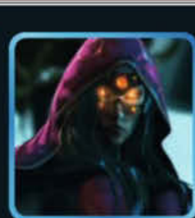
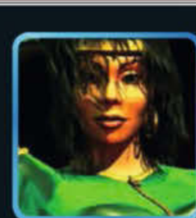



» [Arcade] Glacius surprises *KI2*'s Tusk with a Liquidise and Uppercut attack.

KILLER KAST

Your guide to the franchise's main kombatants


JAGO
FIRST SEEN: KILLER INSTINCT (1994) ARCADE
COOLEST SPECIAL MOVE: RED ENDOKUKEN
■ Abandoned at birth at a Himalayan monastery, Jago has spent his life training as a warrior and has been granted great powers by the Tiger spirit his order serves.

SABREWULF
FIRST SEEN: KILLER INSTINCT (1994) ARCADE
COOLEST SPECIAL MOVE: REVERSE SABRESPIN
■ Having lived as a recluse while he fought the beast within, noble Count von Sabrewulf has come out of hiding to fight for a cure for his worsening condition.

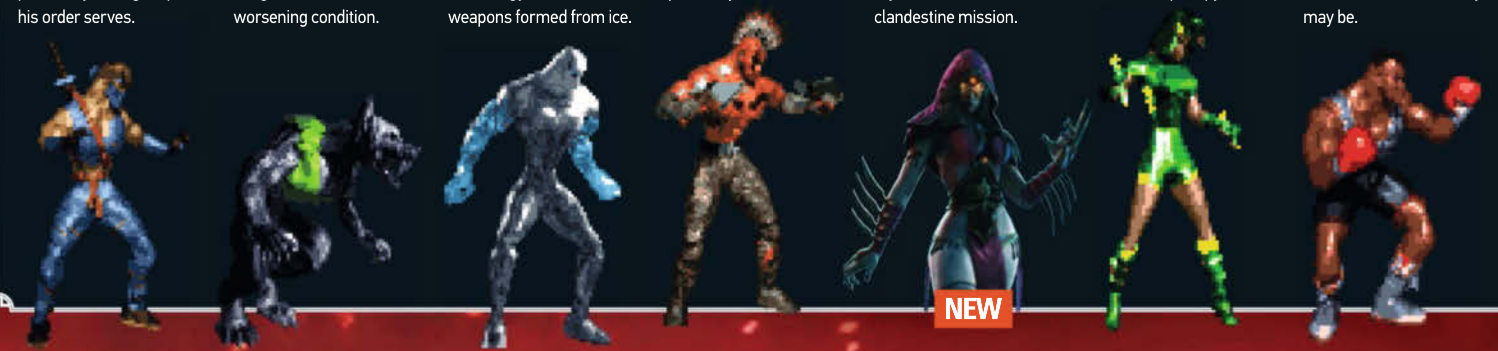
GLACIUS
FIRST SEEN: KILLER INSTINCT (1994) ARCADE
COOLEST SPECIAL MOVE: LIQUIDISE & UPPERCUT
■ Stranded on Earth after a crash landing, then captured and forced into combat, the alien Glacius employs advanced technology to create weapons formed from ice.

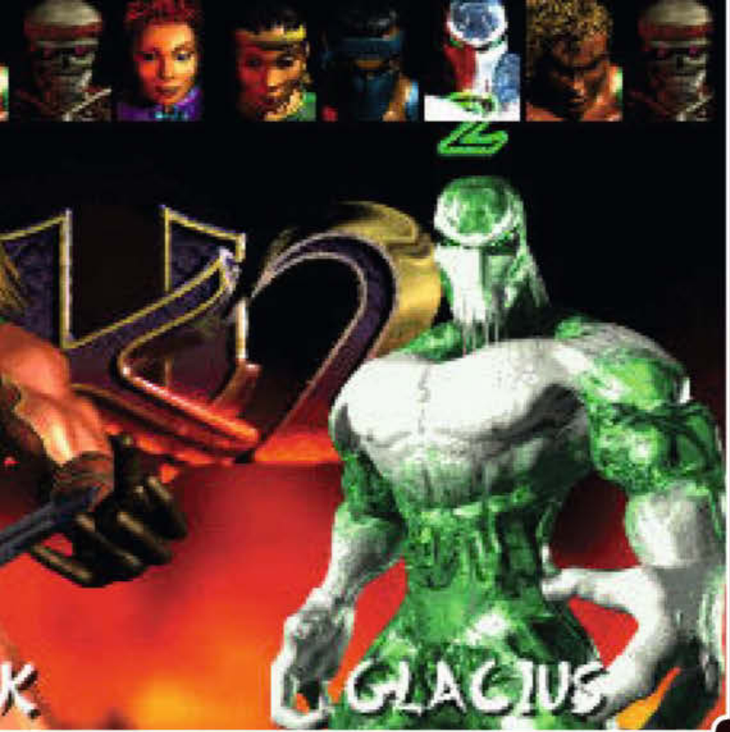
CHIEF THUNDER
FIRST SEEN: KILLER INSTINCT (1994) ARCADE
COOLEST SPECIAL MOVE: SAMMAMISH
■ Seeking to avenge his brother's death at the hands of one of the other fighters, the mystically powered Chief Thunder has taken up arms in his quest for justice.

SADIRA
FIRST SEEN: KILLER INSTINCT (2013) XBOX ONE
COOLEST SPECIAL MOVE: WIDOW'S BITE
■ Little is known about the master assassin Sadira, only that she has a spider-like fighting style and is leading her mysterious Thai clan on a clandestine mission.

BLACK ORCHID
FIRST SEEN: KILLER INSTINCT (1994) ARCADE
COOLEST SPECIAL MOVE: FIRE CAT
■ Codenamed Black Orchid, her true identity is as much a secret as the name and operations of the organisation that trained her to be their ultimate super spy.

TJ COMBO
FIRST SEEN: KILLER INSTINCT (1994) ARCADE
COOLEST SPECIAL MOVE: CYCLONE
■ Found guilty of using cybernetic implants to ensure victory and stripped of all his titles, TJ Combo now fights for whoever will pay, no matter how immoral they may be.





» [Arcade] *KI2*'s barbaric gladiator and stranded alien are selected to fight each other.





» [Game Boy] Enhanced boxer TJ Combo is Sabreslapped by the handheld *KI*'s wulf.

"With KI2 we wanted to make the combat more strategic"

Chris Tilston

the graphics and maintain the gameplay of the original."

Developing *KI2* proved far less of a chore for the pair. "This was great as we had a lot more time and could think about things a bit more," Chris enthuses. "We wanted a solidity to the combat that *KI* lacked. *KI*'s system really needed more time to polish. With *KI2* we wanted to make the combat more strategic, adding in ways to parry and counter-attack as well as throws." Kevin was responsible for the sequel's new look. "I thought it was in need of a little more colour in places, and so steered the characters and effects in a slightly more Japanese direction," he recollects. "The machines we were using at the time would be considered so slow by today's standards, but were very capable of rendering thousands of frames of animation on time. However, with the addition of 'particles' used for generating the hair and clothing on the characters we were pushing our equipment to the limits."

KI2 also saw cast changes, although the plan had been to not replace fighters, as Kevin reveals, "The characters we added were to give more variety. We certainly needed more female characters, and so Kim Wu and Maya were added, alongside Tusk. We did hope to include the original characters, possibly as hidden characters that could be unlocked, but they never made it back in."

KI2 was released into the receding arcade market of 1996 as consoles played catch-up with coin-ops. "By the time *KI2* had released, fighting games were not as popular as they had been. They kind of gave way to first-person shooters," concedes Kevin, before adding, "We wanted *KI2* to look bigger, brighter, shinier, and of course better than the original, and I think we succeeded."

With the much-delayed N64 finally nearing release, work commenced on a port of *KI2* for the system – renamed *Killer Instinct Gold* – but the aging SNES almost got a version too. "This was 80 per cent complete and was looking really, really ▶



FULGORE

FIRST SEEN: KILLER INSTINCT (1994) ARCADE

COOLEST SPECIAL MOVE: PLASMA-PORT

■ Born of cutting-edge science, Fulgore is a prototype for a new type of soldier: part tech, part human and completely remorseless – in short, a cyborg killing-machine.



RIPTOR

FIRST SEEN: KILLER INSTINCT (1994) ARCADE

COOLEST SPECIAL MOVE: JUMP RAKE

■ A product of genetic engineering where human and reptilian DNA were combined, Riptor is a savage predator whose cunning is as deadly as his razor-sharp claws.



SPINAL

FIRST SEEN: KILLER INSTINCT (1994) ARCADE

COOLEST SPECIAL MOVE: SOUL SWORD

■ Suffering from amnesia and flashbacks to a life lived 2,000 years ago, the experiments that reanimated a dead warrior compel Spinal to fight.

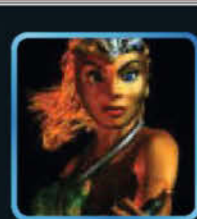


CINDER

FIRST SEEN: KILLER INSTINCT (1994) ARCADE

COOLEST SPECIAL MOVE: TRAILBLAZER

■ Mutated by chemical weapons, his body a living flame, criminal Ben Ferris is renamed Cinder and promised freedom in return for fighting for his life.

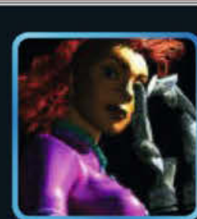


MAYA

FIRST SEEN: KILLER INSTINCT (1994) ARCADE

COOLEST SPECIAL MOVE: SAVAGE BLADES

■ Once Queen of the ancient civilisation Amazonia, Maya has been cast out following the return of Gargos, who she must defeat in order to regain her crown.



KIM WU

FIRST SEEN: KILLER INSTINCT (1994) ARCADE

COOLEST SPECIAL MOVE: AIR TORPEDO

■ As a descendant of great heroes, Kim Wu was made a guardian of her people at birth. She views the vanquishing of Gargos as the task she was born for.



TUSK

FIRST SEEN: KILLER INSTINCT (1994) ARCADE

COOLEST SPECIAL MOVE: SKULL SPLITTER

■ The sole survivor of a warrior race and champion of a gladiatorial arena, Tusk has vowed to kill Gargos as retribution for the deaths of his fallen brothers.



FIGHTING FAILURES

High profile fighting games that failed to set the world on fire

HIGHLANDER 1986

■ One of Ocean's infamously poor film and TV licences – *Street Hawk*, *Knight Rider* and *Miami Vice*, hang your heads – *Highlander* is a button-masher offering little variation. Worse still, its ill-defined combatants arrive via multiload. Thankfully, Gary Bracey ensured Ocean's later licences were high-quality affairs.



DD CREW 1991

■ Sega's colourful brawler promises so much; aside from the pedigree of the publisher's classic 16-bit fighters *Streets Of Rage* and *Golden Axe*, *DD Crew* exudes Nineties attitude and boasts polished pixel art. Sadly, the game is let down by an ineffectual move-set, few enemy types and cheap boss fights.



RISE OF THE ROBOTS 1994

■ *ROTR* was hyped ridiculously – a year-long multi-million pound marketing campaign and fevered magazine previews culminated in a multi-system release. The game uses pre-rendered sprites, but these overtax their host systems so much that the actual game is restricted to basic moves and mechanics.



SHAQ FU 1994

■ If only more diligent QA had been conducted *Shaq Fu* might have emerged as a playable versus fighter. Instead, the game delivers an erratic difficulty curve and slow response times. In fact, the most successful strategy is to repeatedly hammer your fastest move then leap away from your opponent's counter attacks.



3D BALLZ 1994

■ It's childish, but *3D Ballz*'s actual failing is that it just doesn't play very well. It's almost like its engine was created without considering the requirements of a fighting game. The 'fighters made of balls' concept is sound, but *Joy Mech Fight* does this so much better.





» [Arcade] Jungle Queen Maya knocks *KI2*'s TJ Combo back with her Savage Blades.

good," confirms Chris. "Ultimately, Nintendo didn't want it to compete with the N64 version so it was shelved." On *KI Gold* versus *KI2*, Chris offers, "Probably the main difference was much less memory for the backgrounds – so we had to do them fully in 3D. The other main difference was the N64 pad, which was really unsuitable for the game." Kevin adds, "The team did as much as they could to retain the feel and elements of the arcade game – and they offered some new features too! *KI Gold* maybe doesn't feel or look *exactly* like her big brother coin-op, but she's pretty darn close."

Given the decline of arcades, a *KI3* coin-op would have had to fight for every coin, but a third arcade title was considered. "We actually started on this," acknowledges Chris. "I headed up a small team and we had some characters in 3D – two Jagos if I remember – and we did a lot of mo-cap work. Ultimately it was abandoned as management thought it was too similar to *KI* and wanted to do something very different along the lines of a cute robot fighter!"

In the post-arcade era, changing fashions made a console *KI3* unlikely. As Kevin puts it, "In the remaining years I worked at Rare, fighting games had fallen down in the popularity stakes, and so I doubt it would have taken off as well in that era." Chris agrees, "Doing a straight sequel would have been difficult. *KI* SNES was considered a failure because it had only sold just over a third of *DKC* – this was the main reason we didn't carry the series on."





When asked to look back at the *Killer Instinct* series and look forward to its reboot, Chris responds positively on each point, "This was a very happy time where we were so busy or passionate and just purely focussed on making something good. I haven't seen much of the reboot, but I wish Double Helix every success with it." Kevin is proud of *KI* and supportive of its revival, "I think the games still stand out. In gameplay terms, they were winners. We added our own slant on the genre and hopefully created something a little different. I am really pleased to see that *KI* is being resurrected."

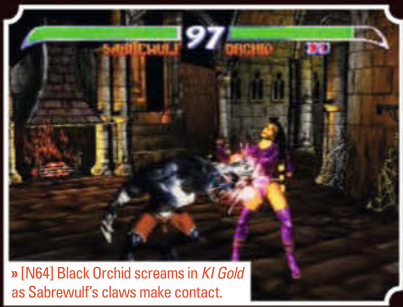
But how did the developer chosen to relaunch Rare's *KI* series, Double Helix Games, secure such a prestigious role? "A fantastic team at Microsoft, led by Ken Lobb and Adam Isgreen, were looking for a developer to bring back the franchise," answers Mike Willette, lead producer of the



» [N64] Jago's perfectly performed Windkick stuns Maya in *KI Gold*.



» [Super Game Boy] Jago nimbly side-steps Glacius' Ice Lance.



» [N64] Black Orchid screams in *KI Gold* as Sabrewulf's claws make contact.



» [Xbox One] The sky lights up as Jago takes on *KI*'s mystic avenger Chief Thunder.

KI reboot. "We jumped at the chance to pitch and design a prototype for the game. They loved our passion and understanding of *KI* – the rest was history."

Mike's passion shines through as he discusses *KI*'s memorable cast, "*KI* has one of the most incredible rosters – werewolves, undead skeletons, warrior monks, super spies… what's not to love? We feel this roster is so unique. There is something to Sabrewulf's struggle that I find incredibly appealing – the inner rage, his signature howl. We look at each character and ask, 'Where have they been? Where are they now? What is their journey?' Then we look at the key reads of each character, their signatures from looks and gameplay, and evolve the design from there. A lot of times we ask ourselves what Rare would have done if they had all of this awesome next-gen tech."

Mike is tight-lipped about the reboot's backstory, but more forthcoming about his team's focus. "We think of this *KI* as a new saga that takes place after the events of the first two games. Our goals were to have tournament-quality depth but have accessibility for new players. To have tools that allowed for us to teach the vocabulary of *KI* – in-depth training and practice modes so players could learn our core systems. We also wanted combos to be awesome and rewarding. We spent focus on the special moves to make sure they were celebrated moments."

KI's combat system was never easily described, but Mike offers a near plain-English explanation of the new title's mechanics, "We opened up the combo system so it was more improvisational – so that people need to learn their opponents and what tendencies they have. You can gamble on when someone is going to try and break your combo – which results in mind games – and we introduced shadow counters that allow players to get out of rush-down block-pressure."

Killer Instinct will have been reborn on Microsoft's shiny new Xbox One by the time this article sees print, but this latest instalment is far from the sum of Double Helix's ambitions. "We see *KI* as an emerging platform," Mike explains. "Akin to a TV series, we want to have multiple seasons and grow the game with the community." So maybe you can teach an old wulf – and friends – new tricks after all.

Many thanks to Chris Tilston, Kevin Bayliss, Mike Willette and Double Helix Games community strategist and manager Rich Bantegui



BRUTAL BOSSES

The hidden mayors of Killer Instinct

In two-player mode, the *Killer Instinct* coin-ops allow players to pick a fighter each round from the games' respective ten-character rosters for as many rounds as their spare change lasts. Playing *KI* or *KI2* solo, however, sees you choosing a combatant and fighting your way through the rest of the cast with them. This is no mean feat, but defeating the fighters in either game isn't your ultimate objective; both titles end with a boss fight. *KI* pits you against Eyedol – a two-headed, cloven-hooved monster with a giant mace – and in *KI2* you face his rival Gargos – a fire-breathing gargoyle-like behemoth. The two warlords' power is reflected in their ability to inflict massive damage with a single blow and to renew their energy. But if you tire of being on the receiving end you can always use the codes that unlock their playable status.



» [Xbox One] Sabrewulf takes to the air as Jago summons the Tiger spirit.



» [Xbox One] *KI*'s mysterious spider woman Sadira bests Sabrewulf at close quarters.

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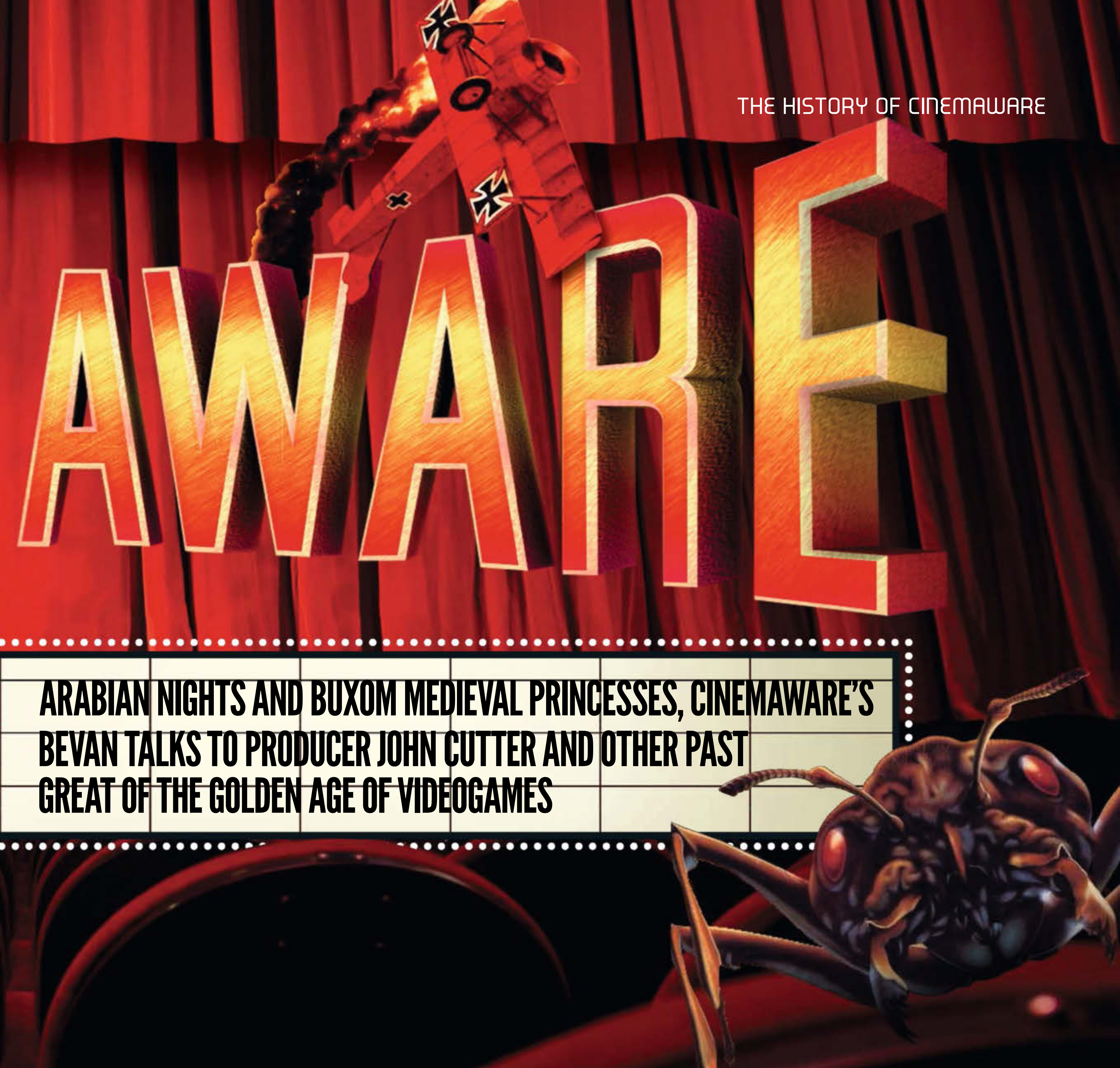
CINEM

FROM KNIGHTS TO MOBSTERS, WORLD WAR I FLYING ACES, THE IMAGINATIVE SOFTWARE CAPTIVATED A GENERATION. MIKE EMPLOYEES TO DISCOVER THE TALE OF A TRUE

To readers of a certain age the name Cinemaware will evoke cherished memories of storming castles, battling giant ants or soaring into the air to fight Nazis. The company's distinctive releases, beginning with *Defender Of The Crown*, showcased the graphic power of a new generation of home computers, particularly Commodore's Amiga. And the stories they told were timeless cinematic archetypes – historical epics, silent comedies, Fifties sci-fi monster movies or Saturday morning matinee-serials with broad-jawed rocket-pack wearing heroes.

"Several of us were raised as gamers on the Amiga, coming from computers like the C64 and Apple II," says Darren Falcus, development director of the modern incarnation of the celebrated company. "Cinemaware, along with maybe LucasArts and Psygnosis, was the leading developer of the time. Its games were cutting-edge in terms of graphics and presentation, but it was in its unique combination of storytelling, gameplay and cinematic sequences that it truly stood out. Cinemaware coined the term 'Interactive Movie', which was inscribed on its game boxes way back in the mid-Eighties, a decade before the term was appropriated by the FMV games from the early Nineties. For those that remember, Cinemaware truly was the Square or Blizzard of its time."

It was the possibilities of working with the new Amiga graphics hardware that drew renowned computer artist Jim Sachs to work on its famous debut. "I had been talking to Aegis Development about doing some projects with them, and one of their partners was Bob Jacob," remembers Jim. "He was forming Cinemaware with game designer Kellyn Beeck, and wanted to recruit me as their Art Director. The three of us flew to Amiga headquarters in Los Gatos to touch bases with the brilliant inventors of that machine and talk about Kellyn's ideas for *Defender Of The Crown*. I was intrigued, and figured I could come up with some great visuals for it. The Amiga was vital to the game, because I would not have been interested in doing it on a lesser machine. *Defender* would have had a very different look if someone else had done the graphics, and Cinemaware might have had a different start."



AWARE

ARABIAN NIGHTS AND BUXOM MEDIEVAL PRINCESSES, CINEMAWARE'S BEVAN TALKS TO PRODUCER JOHN CUTTER AND OTHER PAST GREAT OF THE GOLDEN AGE OF VIDEOGAMES

"Bob had worked in Hollywood for a while and he was kind of a stereotype of a Hollywood agent," recalls John Cutter, Cinemaware's original producer and the company's first full-time employee. "I got my first job in the industry at a company in Santa Barbara called Gamestar. After a couple of years it was bought out by Activision and I lost my job. While trying to figure out what to do next I received a phone call from Bob. He told me he was starting a revolutionary new company and wanted me to be the first employee. I was sceptical. Bob claimed to be working with some really talented contractors on several amazing new games, including a title he named *Defender Of The Crown*.

"We arrived at Cinemaware, which was in a little office park near Thousand Oaks, and Bob took us back to a kind of testing lab where he had an Amiga computer set up. My wife was sort of scowling the whole time, but we were pleased to see that there was an actual office! Bob turned out the lights and loaded up *Defender Of The Crown*. When that amazing title screen appeared my mouth popped open, and when light swept across the metallic lettering my jaw dropped to the floor. Without a second's hesitation my wife leaned over to me and whispered, 'Take the job!'"

"The company was run by Bob and his wife Phyllis," explains John. "They were working with a number of contractors at remote locations and needed someone to help run the office for them. I became a producer and was eventually given the role of director of product development. When I joined the company it already had several games in development: *Defender Of The Crown*, *Sinbad And The Throne Of The Falcon*, and *The King Of Chicago*. I helped finish those games, including a complete rewrite of *Defender* at the last possible minute by RJ Mical."

"The Amiga version of *Defender* was so well-reviewed that it was a must-have game for everybody with the machine," recalls artist Jeff Hilbers, who worked on several Cinemaware games including *King Of Chicago*, *Rocket Ranger* and *Wings*. "But the sales could never get much bigger than 30 or 40 thousand and to be able to sell the game on the Commodore 64 promised to make a whole lot more. That was really Bob's strategy – to build audience reputation and recognition on

the Amiga, then create a degraded version on the C64 that would really pull the money in." It was a strategy that worked, at least as far as the company's debut was concerned, with Jim Sach's head-turning artwork wowing everyone who saw it. *Defender Of The Crown*'s mix of stunning presentation, strategy and romance was unique and very different from anything else on the market. "After the success of *Defender*, Bob, Phyllis and I went and got company cars," chuckles John. "They got BMWs and I picked out a new Mazda RX-7…"

Bob Jacob's Hollywood experience was a major factor in inspiring many of Cinemaware's games, from *Defender Of The Crown*'s sumptuous Ivanhoe-like setting onwards. "Bob was a huge fan of movie serials, so almost all of our titles were inspired by classic cinema," says John. "*King Of The Rocket Men* and *Commander Cody* inspired *Rocket Ranger*, which was designed by Kellyn Beeck and produced by me. Films like *Them* and *Tarantula* lead to *It Came From The Desert*, which David Riordan designed and produced. *Wings* was inspired by an old black and white film by the same title, among others, and also by a ton of research I did in the Thousand Oaks library after the project got unexpectedly dropped in my lap."



» [Amiga] You never forget the time you come face-to-face with *It Came From The Desert's* giant ants.

"Bob was a huge fan of movies, so almost all of our titles were inspired by classic cinema"

John Cutter

Top-tier graphic artists from Jim Sachs to Rob Landeros and Jeff Hilbers contributed state-of-the-art visuals for all of Cinemaware's games, with the exception of the Amiga version of *Sinbad And The Throne Of The Falcon*, although an enhanced Atari ST and PC version was later released. "For a while, we had the best art and presentation in the business," comments John. "After the success of *Defender* we went out and hired real artists and trained them how to use computers. That wasn't really done at the time. The artists used storyboards and even a kind of animatic for some scenes. Deluxe Paint (we just called it 'dee paint') was used extensively at Cinemaware, and the work was quite labour-intensive. I remember Jim Sachs telling me that, prior to his work at Cinemaware, he used to create C64 art by plotting out each colour and pixel on pieces of graph paper. Jim was one of the few people I've met in this industry that I can legitimately call a genius. He was a talented artist *and* he understood the medium."



» [Amiga] *Defender Of The Crown* was used to show off the cutting-edge technology of Commodore's Amiga.

Another key element of Cinemaware's games despite the obvious links to the silver screen was, apart from *The Three Stooges*, the originality of its products. Not being tied to a particular licence or existing movie meant the company's designers were free to create completely new gaming experiences, in most cases mixing role-playing, adventure and strategy with superlative sound and graphics. "We never saw much value in licences," notes John. "In those days it just didn't seem cost effective to spend a bunch of money on someone else's intellectual property. Plus, we really didn't want to be limited creatively. That said, our experience working with Moe Howard's estate on *The Three Stooges* was great. His widow came to our offices one day, which was a really special moment for all of us."

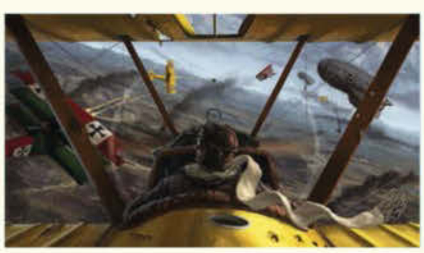


» [Amiga] Paying the price in *The King Of Chigaco*.

CINEMAWARE REBORN

Cinemaware was resurrected in 2000, with 'Digitally Remastered' versions of classics like *Defender Of The Crown* and *Wings* being made available for the Game Boy Advance, and a new game, *Robin Hood: Defender Of The Crown*, being released in 2003 for PC, Xbox and PS2. "It is a great responsibility to be able to keep the memory of these classic games and brand alive," reflects community manager Sven Voessing. "Our goal is to bring Cinemaware's style of games to a new generation of gamers and allow fans to enjoy our games on current platforms as well. In 2011 we started getting a team together to focus on new releases, the first of which was an Amiga-emulated version of *Defender Of The Crown* on iOS. Recently, we announced *Rocket Ranger* for iOS and Android, and *The King Of Chicago* will be coming soon for those platforms.

"We have several other projects in the pipeline, including a re-boot of *Wings: Remastered Edition* via a new Kickstarter crowd-funding campaign. We failed at funding this project last year but are giving it a new go in November, with lots more to show in terms of gameplay and art. We hope this time more fans will back us up so the game can be released during the first semester of 2014. A compilation of all Cinemaware titles under one package is also in the works. Beyond that, if all goes well we certainly have a few surprises up our sleeve for next year including remakes for some of our most popular titles and brand new Cinemaware IPs… because heroes live forever!"



JIM SACHS ON WHAT HAPPENED TO DEFENDER OF THE CROWN II

"I had totally finished the game, and Commodore shipped a few copies just before shutting down operations. It was heartbreaking for me, because I had put a tremendous amount of effort into it. I always felt that a lot more could have been done with *Defender* if we had the time, and a quick way of loading data. Floppy disks were too slow and caused pauses in the gameplay. I had done the demo disk and user interface for Commodore's CDTV and CD32 machines, so I was familiar with them, and knew that the lightning-fast loading and large capacity of CDs would work great for an expanded version of the game. Cinemaware was already out of business, so I approached Commodore with the idea of a 'Director's Cut'. I changed the gameplay somewhat – the player was now trying to raise money to pay the ransom for King Richard, not trying to gain enough influence to become King himself. Then I wrote narration and hired voice actors to record it in five languages. I added animation and new scenes, and wrote all-new music with a fully-orchestrated cinematic opening. Both Commodore and I were quite satisfied with how the product turned out. Unfortunately, Commodore only lasted a few more days…"





However, towards the end of the Eighties Bob's strategy of clinging to the past with old movie tropes was starting to fail. "I think there are several reasons why we struggled at the end and eventually went bankrupt," John admits. "For one thing, Bob and Phyllis always wanted to make sequels to some of our hit games, especially *Defender Of The Crown*, but I talked them out of it. At the time, game sequels, even movie follow-ups, never performed as well as the originals and most were just cranked out. I didn't want that to happen at Cinemaware. I wanted to come up with creative new ideas, because that's what excited me the most. Although in retrospect, the company might have survived a bit longer if we had capitalised on past successes."

"Another factor was that other companies were stepping up their games. I remember when we fired up *Wing Commander* for the first time, Bob came by and watched us play it and I don't think I've ever seen him look so sad. Chris Roberts did a remarkable job on that title. I got to hang out with Chris at a GDC a few months later and when he found out that I designed *Wings* he kindly made a point to come over and talk to me about it, saying that it helped inspire his game. I'll always remember that moment. Finally, we were late getting the PC version of *TV Sports Football* done and that hurt us. The final nail in our coffin was the board of directors at Electronic Arts. Trip Hawkins, the CEO at EA, had negotiated a deal to buy Cinemaware, but at the last minute the board voted the acquisition down. That was the end."

"Bob and I always had a pretty good relationship, but it got a little strained during those final days," confesses John, "and when I learned that he was starting a new company without me I was kind of hurt. When Bob and Phyllis tearfully made their announcement about the company shutting down, Bob walked around the room and said goodbye to everyone. When he got to me he said something like, "And to John Cutter… the Scarecrow…" I was furious! He had never called me the Scarecrow before and I could only imagine that it was a reference to me needing a brain. As we were moving stuff out of the office Phyllis called me over and asked what was wrong. I told her I was angry about Bob's insulting my intelligence… With tears in her eyes she said softly, 'You really are an idiot sometimes. He said that, John, because he's going to miss you most of all.'" Once a movie buff, always a movie buff…



» [Amiga] *Rocket Ranger* was a superb adventure game with varied gameplay mechanics.



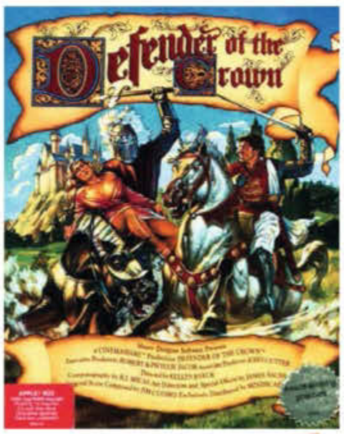
» [Amiga] *SDI* took its inspiration from the Cold War that was taking place at the time.



OUR FEATURE PRESENTATIONS

THE GAMES OF THE CLASSIC CINEMAWARE ERA

DEFENDER OF THE CROWN





» [Amiga] The visuals in *Defender Of The Crown* were superb. It remains an immensely stylish game.

CINEMAWARE AWARD WINNING GRAPHICS

Cinemaware's debut mixed *Risk*-style strategy, played out over a map of medieval Britain, with a number of mini-games – jousting, trebucheting castles and rescuing grateful 'Ladies' with the pointy end of a sword. "Kellyn and I did a fair amount of research into castle design and costumes," says Jim. "We were occasionally at odds with each other, when authenticity would run counter to what I thought people expected to see. For example, castle walls would have been plastered smooth and painted, but most people these days expect them to be bare stone. There were many compromises due to deadlines. I really would have liked to have included a first-person swordfight…"

"Although the art was fantastic, we were having some programming issues," adds John. "With about three months until our deadline, we scrapped all our code and hired legendary programmer RJ Mical to rewrite the game. Kellyn flew to where RJ lived and rented a cheap motel room, but RJ didn't want to be distracted by talking to anyone. So when Kellyn finished any new design documents he would drive over and RJ would tell him to slip everything under the door. I don't think they ever spoke, but RJ pulled off a miracle and finished the game on time."

"Kellyn originally designed *Defender* to play out in real time," John also reveals. "It could have been the first RTS, but we were running into all sorts of bugs so I put on my producer hat and made the last-minute decision to change the game to turn-based. We shipped on time, but I don't know if my decision ultimately helped or hurt the project."



SCREEN: AMIGA
★★★★★
ALSO SHOWING ON: ATARI ST, APPLE II GS, COMMODORE 64, CD-i, AMSTRAD, PC, GBA, NES, MOBILE
0000000000001989

THE KING OF CHICAGO



This Cinemaware title put you into the shoes of a Thirties mob boss on his way up the underworld ladder, attempting to take over the city and dispatch his opponents the good-old Chicago way. "Doug Sharp designed, wrote, and programmed this title for the old black and white Macintosh computer," says John. "It had some really great writing and a very clever dialogue and animation system. We eventually made an Amiga version with all-new art."

"We had a Mac in the office and it was Rob [Landeros] who decided how he wanted the Amiga version to look," remembers artist Jeff Hilbers, "although the characters all have a kind of Magritte quality, a bit like the *South Park* versions of Ben Affleck and Saddam Hussein!"

SCREEN: MAC
★★★★★
ALSO SHOWING ON: APPLE II GS, ATARI ST, PC, AMIGA, SHARP X68000
0000000000001987



THE THREE STOOGES



With its mini-games, quizzes and eye-pokery, *The Three Stooges* saw Moe, Larry and Curly out to save an orphanage. "We used a group in Chicago called Incredible Technologies to make this game," says John. "I designed and produced it from California."

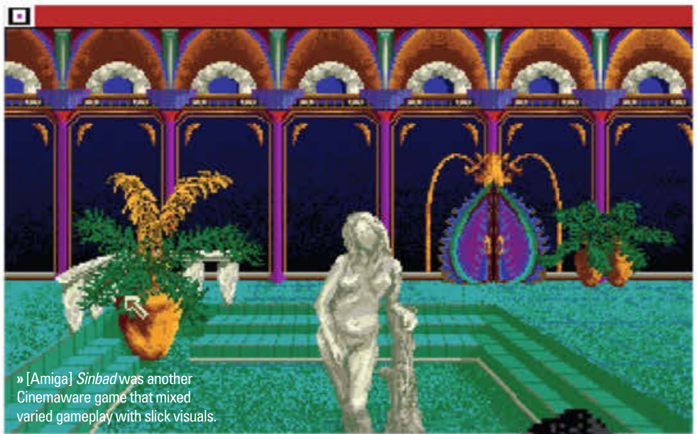
"The game was a natural application for our digitised speech," says Cinemaware programmer and sound designer Larry Irvin. "The goal was to have a large quantity of speech in the game for a more immersive experience. *Three Stooges* source material, in digital form, was not available, so going through *Three Stooges* movies on VHS tape was something I recall doing extensively in order to capture and isolate interesting sequences and classic catchphrases."

SCREEN: AMIGA
★★★★★
ALSO SHOWING ON: APPLE II GS, COMMODORE 64, PC, NES, GBA, PLAYSTATION
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CINEMAWARE AWARD WINNING COMEDY

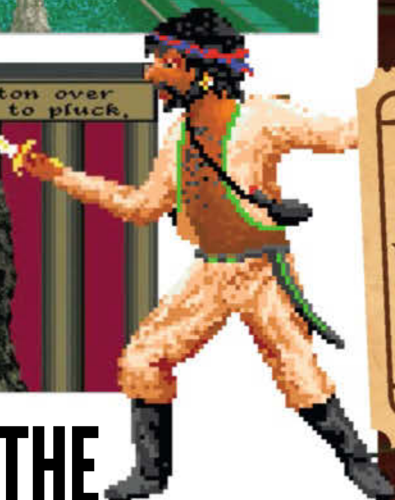




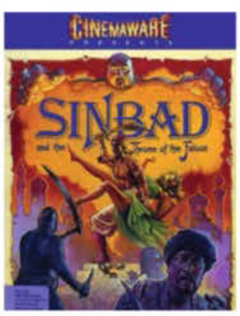
» [Amiga] *Sinbad* was another Cinemaware game that mixed varied gameplay with slick visuals.



» [Amiga] Cinemaware effortlessly captured the spirit of cinematic hits like *Jason And The Argonauts*.



SINBAD AND THE THRONE OF THE FALCON



This action-adventure channelled Arabian intrigue with the spirit of movies like *Jason And The Argonauts* as Sinbad sailed the seas in a quest to rid the realm of an evil Black Prince. "*Sinbad* was designed and programmed by a great guy named Bill Williams who lived somewhere in the Midwest in a geodesic dome," says John. "He was one of the happiest and most upbeat guys I've ever met – I always felt better after talking to him. Unfortunately, when Bob signed the deal he told Bill that he could make *his* game *his* way. Bill really wanted to do everything himself: design, coding, art, sound effects; but his art and animation were not very good relative to the other titles we were making. Bob wanted me to convince Bill to let us redo all the art, but I was never able to change his mind. It was still a pretty good game, but it didn't match *Defender*'s visuals."

"One of the goals in the game is to travel around to various islands and find Ishtiki statues, to recover the gems used for their eyes. I had been playing the game for several months and never really gave that part of the game much thought, but then we hired Kellyn Beeck to help write the manual. He included a really interesting section about the Ishtiki people and how the idols came to exist. Kellyn's history of the Ishtiki worked – when I played the game a few days later I found one of the idols on an island and the hair on the back of my neck went up. That really taught me a lot about the importance of giving players context for important game features."



SDI



SDI was somewhat of a departure from the normal Cinemaware formula, being a 3D space-themed shooter with movie-like interludes and a bit of romance thrown in for good measure. "This game taught me about the importance of having great feedback," comments John. "It was developed in Salt Lake by a group named Sculptured Software and they were using a programmer to create all the art. Midway through development I had our artists redo every screen and animation. A few weeks later we got a new build and it was awesome! Not only had Sculptured put in all the new art, they had tweaked the space combat sequences and made it a lot more fun. When I shot down an enemy ship I was no longer seeing a four frame animation of random pixels, I was seeing a big explosion with ship debris flying out in all directions. It was incredibly satisfying, and thus more fun to play."

"A few weeks before we were about to ship the game I found a practical joke that one of the artists had forgotten to remove. After the protagonist rescues the love interest there's a scene where the two embrace in front of the ship's window, framed by the Earth and stars in the background. After that we cut to the hero in his ship as he heads out to defeat the bad guy. Only this time, the hero's face was covered with lipstick, and he had a goofy grin on his face and a cigarette hanging out of his mouth. That's obviously very tame by today's standards, but at the time it was pretty risqué and I was horrified that the game almost launched with that feature..."





» [Amiga] SDI stands for Strategic Defence Initiative.



» [Amiga] The adventures of Sloan McCormick were translated to other systems, including Atari ST and Mac.



ROCKET RANGER



8861000000000000

SCREEN: AMIGA

★★★★★

ALSO SHOWING ON: COMMODORE 64, APPLE IIGS, PC, MOBILE ATARI ST, NES

0000000000001988

Considered by many fans, along with founder Bob Jacob, to be Cinemaware's finest hour, *Rocket Ranger* thrust players into the role of a lone Nazi-busting hero strapped to a Lunarium-powered rocket pack. "Designed by *Defender Of The Crown*'s Kellyn Beeck, it was a ripping yarn involving giant zeppelins, kidnapped scientists and Axis bases on the Moon. The strategy portion of the game was more in-depth than *Defender*, involving moving spies around a global map screen to discover or infiltrate Nazi facilities, then taking to the skies with the help of your handy Lunarium-fuelling codewheel to put them out of commission.

"*Rocket Ranger* was another game that taught me about the importance of good feedback," says John. "When we first implemented the fist-fight sequence against the Nazi guards we were using white noise (ie static) for the punching sounds. Bill Williams (*Sinbad*) was helping us with sound effects and he stayed up late one night and digitised a fight scene from an old John Wayne movie. We put these sounds in the game and that whole sequence instantly got more fun, because it made players feel like they were in a real movie fight scene!"

"Each of the cut-scene graphics took around two or three days to produce," remembers Jeff Hilbers. "The flying sequence where you were shooting down ME-109s [German fighters] was also very time-consuming as I had to make so many little framesets for the different angles of the planes. Luckily we had a neat animation tool that our programmer, Peter Kaminski, had written for us that let us script all the animations in-game. Eventually, when you got to the moon base we put in that funny Chesley Bonestell rocket sitting on a pad with a little swastika on it… "

"Disney's *The Rocketeer* movie, which came out around the same time, was also inspired by the same movie serials as our game, as well as the illustrated novel," says John. "We had been working on *Rocket Ranger* for a while when we first heard about the movie and that was sort of disappointing, but it probably helped sales. I can't remember who came up with the idea for the codewheel, but I know that Kellyn Beeck, the game's designer, came up with a very clever design that was pretty simple to use. Unfortunately, his version wasn't released and the final product was kind of a pain in the ass."

"Since all the content on *Rocket Ranger* was original we used actors and conducted our recording sessions in our office," recalls Larry Irvin. "There was a large interior room with no windows. That was where some of our artists, who liked working in the dark, had their desks. The retro movie-serial angle was fun to be a part of. Obviously the era predated everyone on staff, so it was fun and fresh to us and was suitable for a linear, sometimes light-hearted storytelling approach weaving in various game interludes. At the time the 'classic' presentation was new to the videogame generation and different from anything else on the market. Together, it all worked."

» A promotional comic was released to tie in with the game.




» [Amiga] *Rocket Ranger* was recently released on Android and should also appear on iOS.


» [Amiga] There are plenty of interesting characters to meet in *Rocket Ranger*.

CINEMAWARE MOST DRAMATIC AWARD

LORDS OF THE RISING SUN



6861000000000000

SCREEN: AMIGA

★★★★★

ALSO SHOWING ON: PC, PC ENGINE, CD-i

0000000000001989

Set in feudal Japan, *Lords Of The Rising Sun* was a kind of Eastern take on *Defender Of The Crown*, although with a more strategic slant including graphic representations of battles and distinct unit types. The game later became an influence on The Creative Assembly's *Total War* series of real-time strategy games. "When I was working at Gamestar some guy from the Midwest wanted to come by and pitch us on a game concept," John recalls. "In walks this guy with a Snidely Whiplash moustache and a big cowboy hat. With a slight drawl he said his name was Doug Barnett and he had a design, and some art, for a boxing game called *Star Rank Boxing*, the first game I ever worked on professionally. Several years later I hired Doug to help us make *Lords Of The Rising Sun*. From his agenting days Bob knew a guy named David Todd and we hired him to do the programming. David used to write code for the Space Shuttle. He later became a full-time Cinemaware employee."

"Though *LOTRS* was a hybrid between arcade and strategy, it incorporated elements that became standard in RTS games," says David. "Gregg Tavares did the coding for the battle sequence, which I think came out really well. The mouse control for those sequences was unique and made it kind of feel like you were manipulating fluid. One thing that I liked about the game was the ability to choose between playing the arcade sequences or letting the AI do it for you. This let you play the arcade sequences you liked and avoid any you didn't care for."



CINEMAWARE BEST DOGFIGHTING AWARD

WINGS



0661000000000000

SCREEN: AMIGA

★★★★★

ALSO SHOWING ON: GBA

0000000000001990

Another well-loved Cinemaware title, *Wings* was a World War I flight simulation with the company's usual slick graphic presentation, featuring a mixture of 3D missions and top-down and isometric arcade-style sequences. "We had wanted to do a flight game for a while," says John. "When we were approached by a 3D programmer named Tim Hays we cooked up the concept of doing a WWI flight sim. We spent several weeks looking for a designer, then Bob walked into my office one day and said, '*you* need to design the game.'"

"I wasn't much of a history buff and I knew nothing about WWI aviation, so I was not at all enthused by this demand. I took the afternoon off to go to the library and I was instantly hooked. The stories I read about young pilots like Albert Ball, René Fonck, Billy Bishop and even German Ace Manfred von Richtofen, were completely fascinating and enthralling. The Wright Brothers flew at Kitty Hawk in 1903, and these pilots were performing aerial reconnaissance and shooting at each other less than ten years later. The courage it must have taken just to get in the cockpit and takeoff, let alone to shoot and be shot at. Incredible… it still gives me goose bumps."

"One tricky aspect of the design was that I really wanted to simulate what it was like to be in a WWI airplane. Unfortunately, if the enemy planes were not in front of the pilot it was tough to follow them, and I really didn't want to put up a gimmicky arrow on the side of the screen. Fortunately, our producer Jerry Albright came up with the idea to have the pilot turn his head to 'look' at the enemy craft. That worked like a charm."




» [Amiga] *Wings* boasted plenty of action, making it great fun to play.

OUR FAVOURITE BITS

TAKE TO THE SKIES



■ Once you've located a Nazi hideout and loaded up with Lunarium, bash the joystick button in time to your footsteps until you hear a beep to achieve lift-off.

BLASTING MESSERSCHMITTS



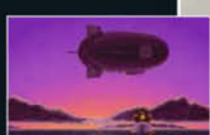
■ Slotting German fighters with your Radium Pistol is simple at first, but by the end they can quickly overwhelm you.

PUNCHING NAZIS



■ Once inside an Axis base it's a case of taking out the guards with good-old fashioned fisticuffs in order to plunder their stock of Lunarium crystals.

CHASING ZEPPELINS



■ Doctor Barnstorff and his daughter have a habit of getting kidnapped by German airships throughout the game, so give chase and rescue them.

FLYING TO THE MOON



■ Where else would the Nazis be building a secret base but the Moon? Later in the game you can construct your own spaceship to get you there.





CINEMAWARE SPECIAL EFFECTS AWARD

» [Amiga] *It Came From The Desert* easily captured the atmosphere of classic monster B-Movies.

IT CAME FROM THE DESERT



Something strange is stirring in the desert outside the south-western US town of Lizard Breath. Cinamaware's colourful homage to Fifties creature-features put you into the shoes of a sceptical geologist attempting to unravel the mystery of disappearing townsfolk and strange rumblings at the local mining works, events that formed the prelude to a full-scale insect invasion. The end result was a truly superb game that effortlessly captured the spirit of the old shool monster movies and delivered it all with typical Cinemaware flair.

"*It Came From The Desert* was really Dave Riordan's project, based on the movie *Them* with James Arness," Jeff Hilbers tells us when we press him about the game's origins. "One of the things everyone wanted was to have these giant animating ants looming out of the screen. You'd see the ants in profile walking sideways but then they would suddenly turn on you, although I always thought the full-screen ant animations were a little unconvincing! I also remember working on the top-down arcade section where the ants were chasing you. I did just about all the backgrounds on that game along with the ants, and Jeff Godfrey did the characters." It was a great partnership that gave *It Came From The Desert* a truly distinct look that set it apart from many other games of the time.



6861000000000000
SCREEN: AMIGA
★★★★★
ALSO SHOWING ON: PC, PC ENGINE
0000000000001989

"Growing up I'd been fascinated by sci-fi creature films," reveals David about the Cinemaware's massively popular game. "I loved the pulp-fiction, the bad special effects and the beautiful screaming girls. When I began to think what stories would lend themselves to interactive narratives, big ants attacking a small town seemed like a natural fit. I knew I wanted to experiment with a 'real-time' environment – it made sense that the impending doom of the big bugs heading

ANTHEADS

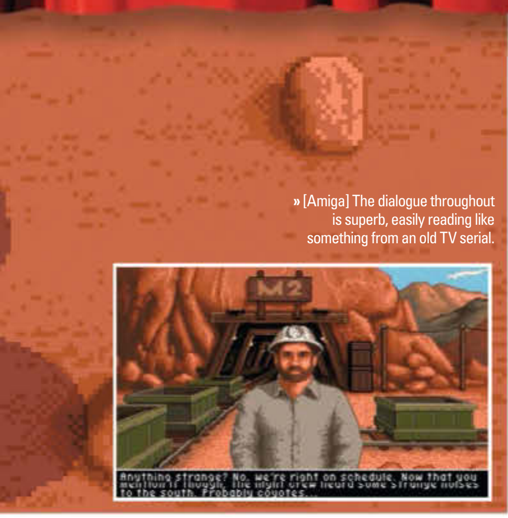


0661000000000000
SCREEN: AMIGA
★★★★★
ALSO SHOWING ON: PC, PC ENGINE
0000000000001990

Jeff remembers:"Cinemaware was trying to make a CD-ROM version of *It Came From The Desert.* Dave got some of his pals from film and they went out to a model railway shop, bought models and constructed this little town on a large table in the office. They were intending to use film actors saying lines of dialogue and the model as a backdrop. Everybody thought that the next generation of interactive games were going to contain lots of live-action film shots. But it all proved too expensive and in the end Bob basically just ran out of money."

A cut-down version of the project ended up as the TurboGrafx version of *It Came From The Desert*, while *Antheads* was eventually released as a sequel bonus disc for the first Amiga game. "*Antheads* was one of eight other scenarios we couldn't include in the original *Desert*," says David. "Our programmer, Randy Platt, came up with the idea of using the original environment but layering in a new story. I loved the concept that people would turn into zombie-like creatures that would help the ants take over. It was almost like the original *Desert* and *Antheads* were one game, released in a serial fashion."



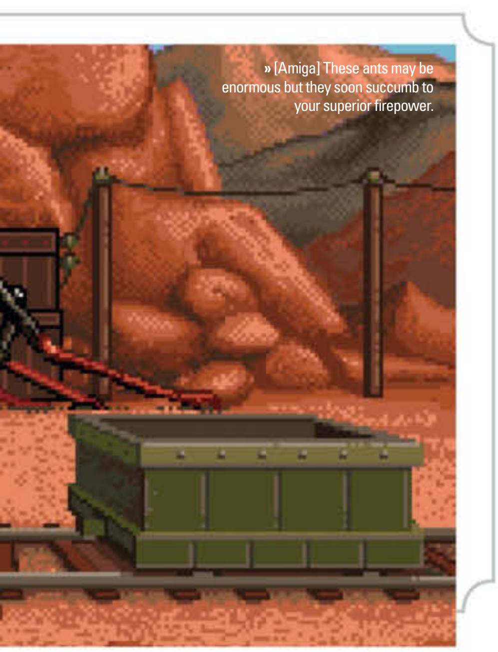


» [Amiga] The dialogue throughout is superb, easily reading like something from an old TV serial.



» [Mega Drive] Cinemaware started work on a Mega Drive run-and-gun but it was never released.

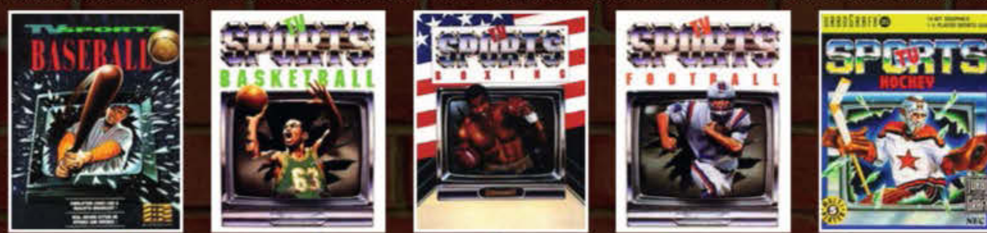
towards town was time-sensitive. This added to the tension… If the player did nothing or goofed around the town was overrun. Half the fun was trying to get the town's people to listen to the hero when he warned them something strange was afoot. How many times have we seen a minor character in a big bug film scoff at the idea of danger, only to be eaten before he can finish his sentence?" Here's hoping it gets a tablet release soon.



» [Amiga] These ants may be enormous but they soon succumb to your superior firepower.

TV SPORTS SERIES

FOOTBALL, BASKETBALL, BASEBALL, BOXING, HOCKEY



Before EA became a household name with the likes of *John Madden Football* and *FIFA*, Cinemaware beat it to the punch with a quintet of sports simulations featuring TV presentation and digitised punditry. "I was a sports enthusiast and followed US sports, having played baseball and basketball throughout school," says Larry Irvin (then Garner). "I discovered that Bob Jacob was a sports fan and John Cutter followed football, and the idea of doing a sports game began to germinate. Bob was always very brand-conscious, so the idea of a football game done by Cinemaware wasn't a natural fit. Over the course of our conversations about presentation, the TV angle was explored. Bob felt that a TV presentation could fit with a product line that featured movie presentations. That became our angle.

"Consistent with the other Cinemaware titles, we took the storytelling approach starting with a familiar pre-game show format that would include comments on the upcoming game. Of course, to complete the TV presentation feel, we had half-time and post-game segments. Our host was 'Turk McGill', who looked like me, and our sideline correspondent was modelled after Bob himself. The crowd featured characters modelled after other Cinemaware staff. Since we did not have official licences, we had to create team rosters and player names. One of the rosters on *TV Sports Basketball* was a collection of twelve Cinemaware employees. We used nicknames that included the likes of 'Gunner' Garner', 'Cookie' Cutter and 'Doctor' Duggan', coached by 'Jammin' Jacob.

"At one point during development, I needed some sound effects and voice placeholders for testing. Having a large supply of voice samples from our previous titles, *Three Stooges* samples became sprinkled throughout *TV Sports Football*. Somewhere I still have a version of the game with *Three Stooges* sounds. Ironically our sound guy on *TV Sports Football*, Jim Simmons, left the company to become the programmer for the original Sega Genesis version of *Madden Football*."





0000000000001987

SCREEN: AMIGA

★★★★★

ALSO SHOWING ON: PC ENGINE, PC, COMMODORE 64

0000000000001987





Special thanks to Lars & Sven of Cinemaware PR and Syd Bolton for their help with this article and The Regent Centre for its assistance with the photography used in this feature.



Vigilante

ARCADE GOODNESS ON NEC'S TINY CONSOLE

RETROREVIVAL

» **PC Engine**
» **Irem**
» **1989**

Ask anyone what the PC Engine's best arcade conversion was and they will always reply '*R-Type*' with a smug look on their faces. There's no denying that Irem's port is an astonishing piece of work, but it's easy to forget that initially the game was split across two separate HuCards, meaning you had to spend a fair amount of cash to enjoy that 'authentic' experience.

Irem was working plenty more magic on NEC's micro console however, no more so than with its superb port of *Vigilante*. It featured all the levels from the game and, more importantly, was crammed onto a single HuCard. The visuals were excellent, doing a fantastic job of capturing the mean and moody looking sprites of the original arcade hit, while the gameplay was just as fast-paced and hectic. Yes you could argue that it's basically *Kung Fu Master* with a grittier Western theme attached to it, but it remained great fun to play, even if (like many similar fighters) it gets rather repetitive towards its end.

If I wanted to be super picky I'd highlight the fact that your girlfriend's arms don't appear through the grills of the van at the end of each stage, or that the sound effects and music aren't as authentic as the visuals, but I'd be being really churlish. *Vigilante* is a fantastic conversion, further proof of the PC Engine's amazing ability to mimic far more powerful arcade machines and a game that needs to be in every owner's collection. A real gem.


TIME
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Minority Report

The Atari ST might not have been the first 16-bit computer on the market, but it was the one that brought 16-bit gaming to the masses. Kieren Hawken looks at some of the games that may have passed you by





» [Atari ST] With a rocket-powered dragon on the title screen you know the game is going to be good!

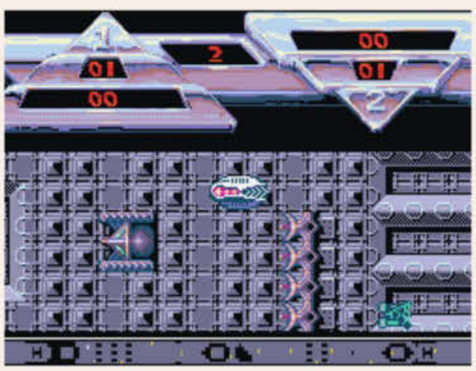
LETHAL XCESS: WINGS OF DEATH II

■ DEVELOPER: ECLIPSE ■ YEAR: 1991

■ **In 1991, Thalion – a software house made up from some of the greatest talent in the Atari ST demo scene – released *Wings Of Death*: a vertically scrolling shoot-'em-up that instantly gained cult status among owners of both the ST and the Amiga (which it was soon ported to) and set new standards for games of its type on the 16-bit home computers. Just a year later the programming team, Eclipse Software (also made up of demo scene coders), released and self-published a sequel called *Lethal Xcess*, which set the bar even higher.**

Like *Wings Of Death*, the ST version of the game was quite unique for the time in that it was programmed to run differently depending on which model of the machine it was being played on. When played on an STe machine the game took full advantage of the extra hardware on offer improving both the graphics and sound as well as adding more enemies into the mix. Among the many technically impressive features of this game are digitised sound, sync-scrolling, overscan and support for two simultaneous players. Another notable feature of game was that all copies of *Lethal Xcess* featured a special dual format that allowed the Amiga and Atari versions to boot from the very same disk!

Sadly the game never achieved the commercial success it should have, which many people blamed on the rampant piracy taking president



» RETURN TO GENESIS

■ DEVELOPER: FIREBIRD ■ YEAR: 1988

■ **Steve Bak's *Return*** *To Genesis* started off life as nothing more than a technical demo to prove that the Atari ST could do fast and smooth multi-level horizontal scrolling. The story goes that Firebird was so impressed with what it saw that it commissioned Steve to turn it into a full game and this is what he came up with – a title that owes much to Hewson's classic *Uridium* with elements of *Defender* thrown in too. You fly over a vast space station in your ship bravely trying to rescue a bunch of scientists who are trapped there. The most unique feature about *Return To Genesis* is the barriers that you can't fly over and simply bounce off.



» CREEPY

■ DEVELOPER: ATLANTIS ■ YEAR: 1991

■ **The Atari ST** game creator STOS saw a real explosion in the homebrew scene for the machine. Many of the games made were featured on magazine cover disks or became part of Public Domain libraries, but there were a select few that were so good that they were picked up by commercial software houses, and Richard Sheperd's brilliant *Creepy* was one of these. Released as part of Atlantis' £6.99 budget range, the game is an unashamed clone of Ultimate's classic top-down Spectrum adventure game *Atic Atac*, which is no bad thing! Can you make your way through the dungeons and escape alive?



» ROBOTZ

■ DEVELOPER: PROJECT X ■ YEAR: 1990

■ **Stern's highly influential** arcade game *Berzerk* has inspired many clones since it was first released in 1980. One of the best of these has to be *Robotz*, a fantastic shareware game for the Atari ST that was released some ten years later. There are a few small differences between the games though. In *Robotz* the metallic enemies take multiple hits to kill and you can't move onto the next screen until you take out the transformer in each room. This means the game becomes a bit more strategic and plays much slower. Interestingly this game was recently remade as *Robotz DX*, a homebrew game from RGCD for the PC!

» [Atari ST] It all starts off very tame but the action soon heats up.



» [Atari ST] Time to send a few more of these aliens to the graveyard below.



» ABOUT THE SYSTEM

- The Atari ST was first launched in 1985 and was the first new Atari machine released under the Tramiel era.
- Code named RBP (Rock Bottom Price), it was also nicknamed the Jackintosh in early production.
- ST is short for Sixteen Thirty-two, after the machine's 16/32-bit CPU, the Motorola 68000.



in the 16-bit market at the time. This led two of the main coders, Heinz Rudolf and Claus Frein, to quit the industry completely and become IT technicians. However, the designer Richard Karsmakers and coder/producer Marc Rosocha went on to make many more games for the ST. All the music for *Lethal Xcess*, like its prequel, was provided by none other than Jochen 'Mad Max' Hippel and is regarded by many as being the best soundtrack in any game released for Atari's computer.

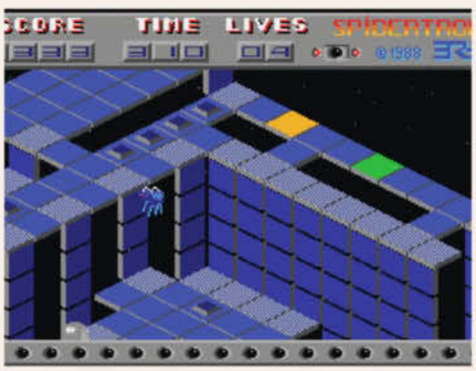
As far as the actual game goes, *Lethal Xcess* takes place over five fantastical levels that are every bit as creative as the original *Wings Of Death*. There are volcanic wastelands, lush jungles and barren deserts. each of which has its own enemies. Some of them are huge – the game boasts that up to 150 sprites could appear on the screen at any one time! As you can imagine the bosses are equally impressive and require some real skill to defeat. What about power-ups we hear you ask? Well there are plenty of them too! The power-up system, like many Japanese shooters, revolves around different types of weapons that can be upgraded or changed as the game goes on. By collecting the same icons your weapon can become really fierce.



There are very few games on the Atari ST that impress as much as *Lethal Xcess* does. It ticks all the boxes as both a game and a tech demo. For quite a few years now there have been rumblings of a sequel/remake being made for modern machines and we really do hope that it happens.



» [Atari ST] We appear to be surrounded, unleash laser death!



» SPIDERTRONIC

■ DEVELOPER: ERE INFORMATIQUE ■ YEAR: 1988

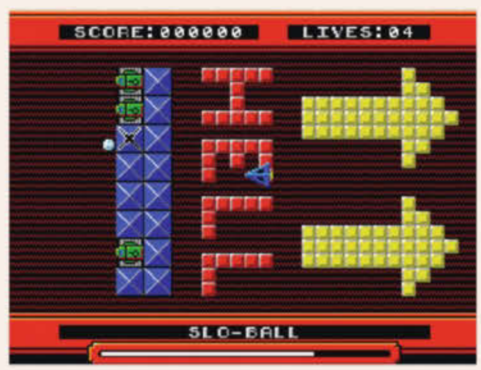
■ **An isometric arcade** style game by French coders ERE, *Spidertronic* gives the early impression of being a clone of Atari's classic *Marble Madness*. When you actually sit down to play it though you will soon see that it's a very different game. You control a spider that must try to escape each of the perilous levels. This is done by collecting a series of coloured squares and then placing them down like stepping stones to reach the exit. Each stage has multiple levels and our eight-legged hero must utilise the lifts to make his way around them. *Spidertronic* is a wonderfully unique and original game that provides a great deal of good honest fun.



» G NIUS

■ DEVELOPER: LANKHOR ■ YEAR: 1988

■ **Back in the** Eighties French software houses were renowned for releasing some of the wackiest and most original games on the market. One look at some of the games featured in this article only confirms that, and Lankhor's *G Nius* is one of those standout titles that mixed quirky and fun to great effect. You take the roll of our titular hero who is a servicing droid aboard a futuristic space station. But today you find that the place has gone out of control and you need to shut it all down by locating and activating all the power switches. With its great isometric graphics and digitised sound, *G Nius* is a real winner for the Atari ST.



» SNOBALL IN HELL

■ DEVELOPER: ATLANTIS ■ YEAR: 1991

■ **There are very** few arcade games over the years that have inspired more clones than Atari's *Breakout*. While *Arkanoid* is probably the most famous of them, Atlantis's *Snoball In Hell* is definitely one of the most interesting. For a start the game takes on a horizontal perspective as opposed to the standard vertical one. Then there are the shoot-'em-up elements that have been added to the game, meaning that you have to cope with hordes of attacking enemies as you bounce your ball off the bricks in front of you. This makes the game a lot more challenging than your average *Breakout* clone and well worth a play.

Minority Report



STARRAY

■ DEVELOPER: LOGOTRON ■ YEAR: 1988



» [Atari ST] If you own a 1Mb machine you get a sampled music track on the title screen.



» [Atari ST] *StarRay*'s gameplay is every bit as impressive as its gorgeous graphics.

■ ***StarRay* might not be the most original game out there – it's pretty much a straight clone of classic Williams arcade game *Defender* – but it is, without doubt, one of the finest games to grace this 16-bit home computer.** Published by Logotron in 1988, it was often featured as part of a two game set along with *Star Goose*; a unique vertically-scrolling shoot-'em-up. It is most notable however for being programmed by legendary ST coder Steve Bak, who first made his name with *Goldrunner* before going on to program titles like *Leatherneck*, *James Pond 1* and *2*, *Yolanda* and *Return To Genesis*. He was not the only superstar involved with this game though, as the simply stunning music present in *StarRay* was produced by none other than David Whittaker.

After being blown away by the introduction speech and sampled title track you will be even more impressed by the in-game graphics; *StarRay* does things that people didn't think were possible on the ST at the time, delvering plenty of graphical tricks to ensure a brilliant arcade-like experience. With no hardware scrolling Atari's machine often struggled to keep up with the rival Amiga when it came to keeping things smooth. Many games either suffered from jerky scrolling or ran slower to keep it smoother. Not *StarRay* though; not only does it have incredibly fast and smooth scrolling but also has around ten levels of parallax in the background. In fact many would say the ST version actually surpasses the one found on the Amiga in many ways. A truly superb blaster.

» BLACK HORNET

■ DEVELOPER: HI-TEC SOFTWARE ■ YEAR: 1991

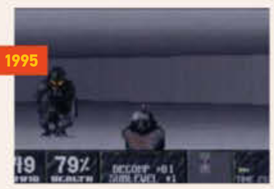
■ This probably isn't the most original game in the world, but it is a very good one. Especially when you consider that this budget release has some of the best music we have heard in any ST game.



» SUBSTATION

■ DEVELOPER: UNIQUE DEVELOPMENT STUDIOS ■ YEAR: 1995

■ The best FPS on the ST, *Substation* shows that Atari's machine could still keep up with the competition in the mid-Nineties. It's late release means many never saw this though.





» MANHATTAN DEALERS

■ DEVELOPER: SILMARILS ■ YEAR: 1988

■ ***Manhattan Dealers* is** a very interesting beat-'em-up from French programmer Silmarils, which is probably best known for games like *Ishar* and *Robinson's Requiem*. It certainly seems to owe a lot to Taito's classic arcade game *Renegade* but also features many original elements of its own. You play the part of a cop who is trying to clean up the streets of New York. The murky back alleys are infested with drug dealers and it's your job to duff them up, take the drugs and then take them back to the station. These dealers are hardcore thugs however, who are armed with knives, chains and even chainsaws.



» ROCK 'N' ROLL CLAMS

■ DEVELOPER: CASPIAN SOFTWARE ■ YEAR: 1994

■ **This is a** wonderfully original and downright zany one or two-player platformer with STe enhancements. You have to bounce your clam around each level collecting the musical notes so you can take Casper Clam and his band from the bottom of the ocean to the top of the charts! *Rock 'N' Roll Clams* has all the charm of games like *Bubble Bobble* and *Rodland*, but this one is in fact an Atari ST exclusive. Having been released in the twilight of the ST's lifetime, this game was ignored by many people and it's about time we changed that! Fans of platform games will certainly want to hunt this one down.



» YOLANDA

■ DEVELOPER: MILLENIUM ■ YEAR: 1990

■ **Never have we** found a game that is so bloody frustrating yet so addictive at the same time. In this sequel to the 8-bit game *Hercules* you guide the titular Yolanda through a series of single-screen stages where your goal is a very simple one: to get her to the exit. You do this by jumping across platforms and climbing ropes. This is not as easy as it sounds though, as there are numerous enemies trying to stop you and plenty of hazards in your way. One touch of these and you are dead and will have to start over again! *Yolanda* will certainly test your patience to the limits.

OBSESSION

■ DEVELOPER: UNIQUE DEVELOPMENT STUDIOS ■ YEAR: 1994

■ Swedish studio Unique Developments was responsible for some of the most impressive games released on the Atari ST, it's just a shame that many of them came about too late in the machine's life to really get noticed.

Obsession is typical of the level of quality produced by the developer and is a pinball game released in 1994 that only works on STe and Falcon computers with at least 1MB of RAM. If you didn't know any better you would actually swear that this was part of the *Pinball Dreams*/*Fantasies* series by 21st Century Entertainment. Not only does the name fit, but the whole style of the game right down to the dot matrix-style displays is identical. They do say imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, but we do feel that 21st Century might not have been too pleased about this had the game been more of a commercial success.

One of the biggest benefits of *Obsession* is the sheer amount of longevity it offers, due to featuring 4 different tables: Aquatic Adventure, Balls And Bats, X-ile Zone and Desert Run. They feature similar themes to the games created by Digital Illusions CE and have the same convincing physics and table design that made those tables to fun to play. Each one is utterly gorgeous with over 40 colours on screen (the ST is supposed to be limited to 16) and five-channel stereo music plus sound effects and speech. We've always been fans of pinball games here at **RG** and, without doubt, *Obsession* is the finest example of the genre on Atari's 16-bitter.



» [Atari STe] *Obsession* makes stunning use of the STe's enhanced colour palette.



» [Atari STe] Each of the tables has its own unique theme that adds to the appeal.

» ZERO 5

■ DEVELOPER: ZERO 5 ■ YEAR: 1994

■ This amazing 3D polygon space game takes *Star Raiders* to a new level and only works with the enhanced STe versions of the computer, taking full advantage of the extra hardware.



» WARLOCK'S QUEST

■ DEVELOPER: ERE INFORMATIQUE ■ YEAR: 1988

■ Ere released some really quirky games for the ST, and this split-level arcade adventure is a real hark back to the early days of the 8-bit computers – albeit with some spanking digitised sounds.





» TO BE ON TOP

■ DEVELOPER: RAINBOW ARTS ■ YEAR: 1988

■ ***To Be On** Top* is an arcade adventure of sorts by German company Rainbow Arts with a real Europop flavour to it. You are a struggling musician looking for inspiration for a hit single and you make your way around the town looking for it. You enter buildings such as bars, shops and houses looking for instruments to help you produce your record. As the game progresses you see your position in the charts slowly rise and it's your eventual goal to get to number one! *To Be On Top* is a wonderfully unique game that sums up the late Eighties. Jochen Hippel's music is the real star of the show though, perfectly complementing the in-game action.



» CYBERNETIX

■ DEVELOPER: VISION SOFTWARE ■ YEAR: 1992

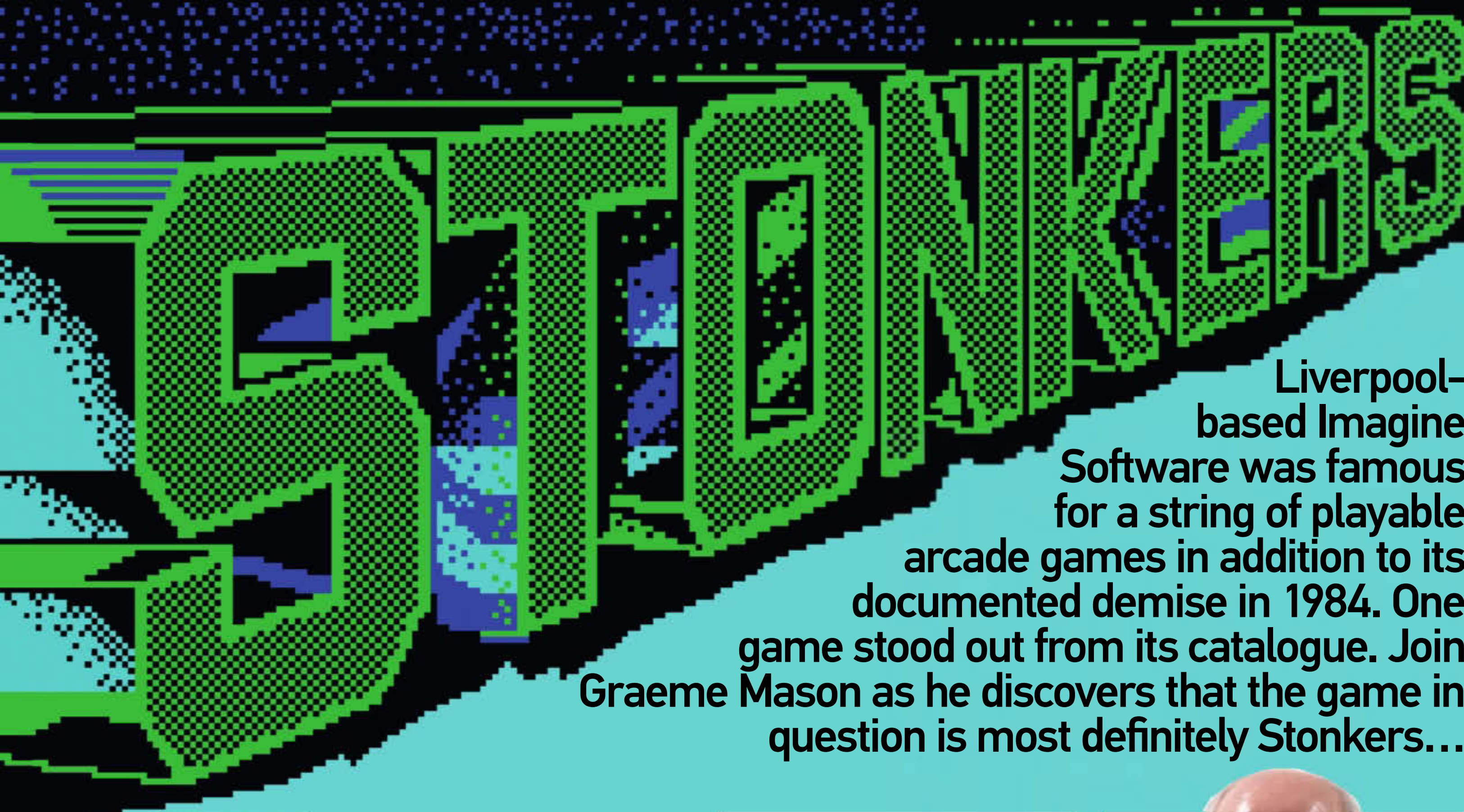
■ **This shareware game** from New Zealand's Vision Software is somewhat of a cult classic among ST owners. The first time most people played it is when it was given away on an *ST Format* cover disk. A wonderful mix between *Asteroids* and *Defender*, *Cybernetix* is a horizontally-scrolling shoot-'em-up of the highest quality that still holds up well today. The core gameplay is pretty similar to the seminal Williams classic but without the need to save any humans – it's purely in space. As well as enemy ships there are also asteroids floating around that split into pieces like the Atari game. Add in a few power-ups and we have a real winner.



» VROOM

■ DEVELOPER: LANKHOR ■ YEAR: 1991

■ **Lankhor's *Vroom* really** blew people away on its release, a Formula One-styled racing game that really showed just what could be done with the Atari ST in the right hands. In fact in impressed audiences so much that the publisher hired the French team behind it to covert it to the Sega Mega Drive as an official FOCA-licensed F1 game. Featuring real circuits from around the world and a behind-the-wheel viewpoint, the most unique aspect of *Vroom* is the way it mixes 3D polygons with 2D bitmaps to provide a super-fast and very realistic racing experience. This is definitely the best game of its type on the 16-bit Atari.



Liverpool-based Imagine Software was famous for a string of playable arcade games in addition to its documented demise in 1984. One game stood out from its catalogue. Join Graeme Mason as he discovers that the game in question is most definitely Stonkers…



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** IMAGINE
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **RELEASED:** 1983
» **PLATFORM:** SPECTRUM
» **GENRE:** ARCADE STRATEGY

With the ZX Spectrum and home computing in general in its infancy, the early Eighties was a ripe time to enter the gaming market. Many software houses were still selling games via mail-order and with photocopied inlays; the opportunity for massive sales with professionally designed and distributed products was there for the taking. Imagine grabbed the opportunity with both hands.

Working at Imagine was John Gibson, who, in his mid-Thirties, was one of its older employees. John had already produced a brace of best-selling games in the toothbrush-'em-up *Molar Maul* and *Zzoom*, a fast-paced shoot-'em-up, both of which also boasted the customary slick Imagine presentation. "Actually, as with *Zzoom*, it was Dave Lawson who came up with the idea for *Stonkers*," says John, boasting a little less of that famously shaggy hair from 30 years ago, "and he wanted the emphasis to be on the graphics and real-time action to bring the game closer to their other games." As John told *Sinclair User* in May of 1984: "I based it on TV and Film documentaries, wargame magazines and common sense. The complexity of the strategy was naturally restricted to what I could fit into the computer's memory."



» [Spectrum] Each unit had a handy little summary of its strength, mobility and supply.



Dave Lawson's brief to John was loose but succinct. "[Dave] made it clear that it was essential that the game portrayed a sense of urgency," explains John, "so that if you took too long, pondered too much over your next move, you'll get beat. He also came up with the name: 'Stonk' is World War II British army slang for a massed artillery bombardment on an enemy position, so *Stonkers* seemed apt." In order to portray the required sense of urgency, John introduced the supply mechanic to *Stonkers* early on. The player had to ensure troops were adequately re-supplied on a regular basis in order to maintain their effectiveness. "It gave you something else to worry about. Without supplies, your troops and equipment would become progressively less efficient and of course there was that classic aspect of war: don't allow your supply chain to get too long."

John began writing *Stonkers* in the summer of 1983 using one of Imagine's Sage IV computers. "It was amazing being able to store everything on one disc rather than lots of separate ones," smiles John, "and before that I was using an Apple 256k. I never actually programmed directly into the Spectrum." And why would you, muses **Retro Gamer**, when you have a massive 1MB to play with on an advanced computer such as the Sage IV? "Those were the days! Kids today don't know they're born!" Yet most videogame development was incredibly different 30 years ago. Even the loading screen for *Stonkers* had a painful genesis. "Paul Lindale drew the loading screen on graph paper as a line drawing," recalls John, "and we then filled in the squares which were traversed by lines. Finally, Ian Weatherburn 'read' the graph paper as hexadecimal numbers, which I typed into the computer to give the image's bit pattern. Quite amazing we had to do all that."

With pressure mounting to have the game completed in time for Christmas, John began to develop the game's (then) complex AI. "I actually stole the idea for the AI from an Apple II game called *Eastern Front*, which I came across in an article in a magazine." he admits. "The article revealed that the AI processing was done in the vertical sync interrupt routine. The game was basically given a small amount of time every 50th of a second to refine



» [Spectrum] The infamous bridge, defence of which was key to victory. However approaching it a certain way also induced a game-crashing bug.



» [Spectrum] Taking out the enemy's supply vehicles may not be very honourable, but it was an effective way of disrupting your opponent.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ARCADIA
SYSTEM: SPECTRUM, COMMODORE 64
YEAR: 1982

ALCHEMIST **(PICTURED)**
SYSTEM: SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1983

JUMPING JACK
SYSTEM: SPECTRUM, ATARI (AS 'LEGGIT!')
YEAR: 1983



» [Spectrum] The heat of battle, accompanied by glorious colour clash.

its strategy." What this meant in terms of gameplay was that the longer the player took to move, the smarter the computer became, although John didn't really recognise at the time the beginnings of what would eventually be called real-time strategy. "I designed the AI in such a way that you could win (and lose) in many different ways. I didn't sit down and think about winning strategies and then design the AI around them." With the Spectrum hardware and memory proving restrictive, John used other ways of making the gameplay and visuals impressive, such as the map zoom feature. "It doesn't actually zoom," he laughs, "as there were two maps, the detailed one and a zoomed out one, so it was just a case of changing maps. It was like a cheat really; it wasn't really like a camera zooming in." Nevertheless, the pseudo-zoom technique worked well and was an impressive feature of *Stonkers*.

But of course as many a frustrated gamer of the time may recall, eventually the time pressure on *Stonkers* had an effect; the game was infamously bugged. "I wasn't given any time to Q&A test," laments John. "No sooner had I written the last line of code and transferred the game to tape, it was whisked off for duplication. It was actually amazing that the game only had the one major bug. Maybe it's a testament to my programming techniques…" he smiles mischievously. The bug itself caused much friendly banter in the Imagine offices. "My late, dear friend Steve Cain used to play *Stonkers* a lot and he'd worked out how to approach the bridge in such a way as to avoid the crash." Yet many gamers didn't, and the bug created the catchphrase 'don't go near the bridge', which John is still occasionally reminded of today. "The public were told it was the result of a faulty batch of tapes and offered a free replacement," he reveals, "but it was the same version. I wanted to fix the bug but Dave Lawson wouldn't let me; he wanted me to get stuck into *Bandersnatch* [one of the ill-fated 'mega games' that contributed to Imagine's demise]."

John Gibson has had a long and successful career in videogames. Today he works at Evolution Studios, and has been involved with best-selling franchises such as *World Rally Championship* and *MotorStorm*. He looks back at *Stonkers* both fondly, and with a grimace.

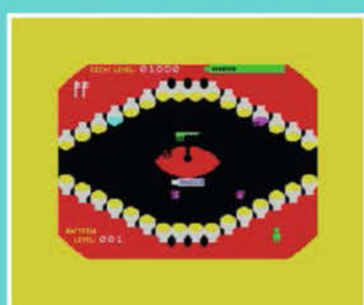
> **"It was actually amazing that the game only had the one major bug"**
> John Gibson

"As an example of structured programming, *Stonkers* was awful and was actually a digression. *Zzoom* saw the beginnings of a game engine that I used on all my games for years to come, with the exception of *Stonkers*. If I still had the source code for *Stonkers* I would donate it to a University games design course so that it could be used as an example of how not to program!" says John self-deprecatingly. "Having said that, I'd say I'm quite proud of it. I was a very inexperienced programmer back then, so it was quite an achievement!"

IMAGINE GIBSON

How John contributed to Imagine's success

Stonkers was John Gibson's third and final game for Imagine Software and all three were coded within one manic year, 1983. Firstly, he produced the mouth-cleaning game *Molar Maul* which *Crash* magazine called an "excellent game with wonderful graphics". Even better was *Zzoom*, a fast-paced arcade simulator that stood head and shoulders above the majority of Spectrum games in 1983 and notched a perfect 100 per cent in *Home Computer Weekly*.





» [Spectrum] Your reward for victory Commander.

21 BUDGET GAMES

They were the games you could pick up for a few quid, and gamers did just that – in their millions. David Crookes celebrates 21 of the best budget games of all time





Slimey's Mine

VALUE FOR MONEY 7

- **PUBLISHER:** SILVERBIRD
- **YEAR:** 1988 **GENRE:** ACTION

***Slimey's Mine* was** an audio treat. Gamers controlled a frog around a series of mines, collecting diamonds and avoiding death. The game, while undoubtedly addictive from the start, was immeasurably lifted by its incredible sound effects. At once passionate, fun and hilarious, they would vary from the main character snoring whenever the game was paused to sounds of pain or elation.

It came at a cost, however: it took a long time to load. It was up front about this, delivering the message: "I'll tell you why you've got to wait so long. It's because this game contains tons and tons of samples, all of ridiculously high quality, which is what we've come to expect from Spicko." It wasn't lying and it was all the better for it. That said, the game did feel repetitive the further players advanced, but the game's cartoon-like nature and pace helped make it a classic and it stands up to re-plays today.



Zybex

VALUE FOR MONEY 8

- **PUBLISHER:** ZEPPELIN GAMES
- **YEAR:** 1988 **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

Brian Jobling founded Zeppelin Games aged just 17 and *Zybex* was one of his early releases, combining chunky colourful graphics with non-stop action. It was a horizontally scrolling shoot-'em-up with 16 levels and a unique weapon system in which the player fired continuously and automatically.

Players used the fire button only to change their weapon and choosing wisely would give the player a better chance of completing a level. It therefore put an emphasis on strategic dodging and decision-making. The idea overall was to free colleagues from their galactic imprisonment, a task made difficult due to the sheer relentless numbers of tight-knit enemies.



CJ's Elephant Antics

PUBLISHER: CODEMASTERS
YEAR: 1991 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

With a romp through Paris, Switzerland, Egypt and a jungle, CJ got around quite a bit in this adventure game that, while proving to be familiar platforming fare, was a wonderful example of its genre. From the intro showing CJ's escape from a plane to the way CJ floated gently to earth via an umbrella, this was a game that was easily an equal of many a full-pricer. The sheer assortment of spikes, moving platforms and other such genre clichés may not have combined into the most original game ever made, but the sparks of genius – such as two-player mode – made it a much-loved pocket money must-have.



Master Of Magic

PUBLISHER: MASTERTRONIC
YEAR: 1985 **GENRE:** RPG

Released under Mastertronic's MAD label, the dull presentation of *Master Of Magic* hid a spirited game, a fitting swansong from Richard Darling in what proved to be the last title he created for the publisher before founding Codemasters with brother David.

The game used artificial intelligence techniques and provided an arcade feel of sorts to the RPG genre. Gamers moved a small square around a tiny map and relied on a scroll to explain the action. Representative images were used to illustrate any major events.

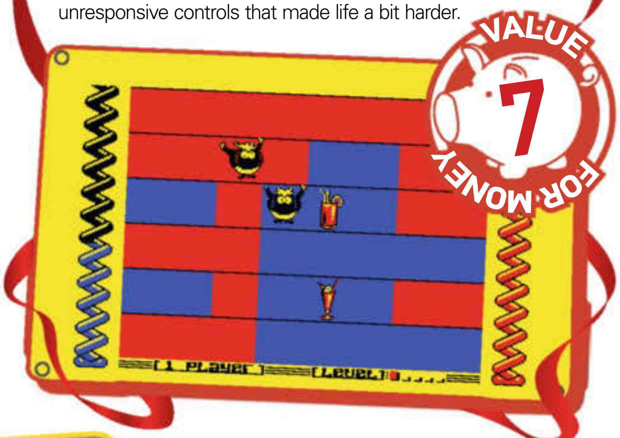
Gameplay relied on trial and error to some degree but there was a great deal of death to dish out, spells to cast and items to loot and it could be played in pretty much any way you wanted. Enhancing all of this was a blistering theme tune by Rob Hubbard.

Harvey Headbanger

PUBLISHER: FIREBIRD
YEAR: 1986 **GENRE:** ARCADE

Swinging around on a climbing frame, Hamish Highball and Harvey Headbanger were two old drunks on a potent mix of cocktails. Players had to help them to turn a set of squares into either red or blue, depending on which character was under their control. By surrounding the opposing player with their own trail, the round was won.

While the gameplay was limited, the bright, colourful and cute graphics of the two rotund leads was very appealing and it came into its own in two-player mode. The fast action required some nimble reactions but it was let down at times by unresponsive controls that made life a bit harder.





Action Biker

PUBLISHER: MASTERTRONIC
YEAR: 1985 **GENRE:** ACTION

Sponsored by KP Skips, the Spectrum version of *Action Biker* was simply dreadful. It was lucky, then, that the Atari and Commodore 64 versions of the game were totally different beasts altogether and far surpassed their counterpart. Gamers explored a 3D town on a bike that – at first glance – appeared to be travelling backwards, riding around houses, lakes and roads to pick up various objects while keeping a careful eye on the fuel gauge.

Andy Payne, CEO of Mastertronic



Why did you decide to sell games at a budget price?
In the mid-Eighties Mastertronic led the introduction of 8-bit games sold at a low cost. It was founded by Alan Sharam and Frank Herman, both who have sadly passed away and were great friends of mine. I worked with Mastertronic back then and we found that smaller shops would stock games only if they were priced cheaper than full-price games, which meant their stock risk was a whole load less. Games sold at pocket money prices became affordable for all and the rest was history.

Did cheaper games help to grow the industry at that time?
Yes. In the Eighties the market increased massively when the price of games reduced.

Was there a sense that budget games were inferior to full price?
Back in the Eighties games cost a whole load less to make and the Mastertronic games were no less quality than many games sold at higher prices.

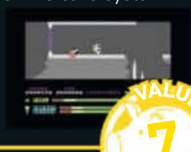
Which budget games stood out for you as a publisher?
The best budget game that Mastertronic ever published, in my opinion, was *Way Of The Exploding Fist* on C64. Brilliant game, first of its kind and revolutionary graphics. Later, as Sold Out our best game was *Theme Park* – a Bullfrog classic game that we licensed from EA – and of course *RollerCoaster Tycoon 2* which was both brilliant and sold in huge quantities. *RollerCoaster Tycoon 3* is one of our best-sellers even to this day.



Phantom Of The Asteroid

- **PUBLISHER:** MASTERTRONIC
- **YEAR:** 1985 ■ **GENRE:** ARCADE ADVENTURE

Whether it was the Rob Hubbard soundtrack which caught our attention or the superlative scrolling, this was a game that quickly hooked fans of arcade adventures. The cave system was vast and there was so much going on, it compensated for its slow speed most of the time.



VALUE 7 FOR MONEY

Flash Gordon

- **PUBLISHER:** MASTERTRONIC
- **YEAR:** 1986 ■ **GENRE:** ACTION

***Flash* (a-hah…) delighted** with a three-in-one package that started with a horizontal platformer strewn with nasties to blast and holes to leap over. It changed into a kung-fu beat-'em-up in the mould of *IK* for the second level and finished with an arcade jet-bike sim.

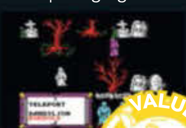


VALUE 9 FOR MONEY

Feud

- **PUBLISHER:** BULLDOG
- **YEAR:** 1987 ■ **GENRE:** ARCADE ADVENTURE

As a game just crying out for players to grab a pen and paper and scribble down a map, *Feud* was almost a latter-day Bake Off challenge with the player competing against an NPC to amass as many herbs as possible, only these were being used to cast devilish spells.



VALUE 9 FOR MONEY

Chronos

- **PUBLISHER:** MASTERTRONIC
- **YEAR:** 1987 ■ **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

***Chronos* was a** simple scrolling shoot-'em-up and it aped the *Scramble* games well. The high score table encouraged repeat play but, while it's fair to say the game was easy (keep firing and dodge the landscape furniture), this in turn made for some great stamina play.



VALUE 7 FOR MONEY

The Last V8

- **PUBLISHER:** MASTERTRONIC
- **YEAR:** 1985 ■ **GENRE:** RACING

It did not review well due to a high difficulty level and awful controls but Jim Wilson's presentation was superb, producing an interface that, while squeezing the playing area, also proved coder David Darling would not skimp when it came to creating budget games. Rob Hubbard's audio excelled.



VALUE 7 FOR MONEY



Spellbound

- **PUBLISHER:** MASTERTRONIC
- **YEAR:** 1985 ■ **GENRE:** GRAPHIC ADVENTURE

VALUE 7 FOR MONEY

Not to be confused with the Spectrum puzzle-platformer released by Beyond Software, *Spellbound* was an intelligent sequel to *Finders Keepers*. Ignoring the plot – something about better-tasting rice puddings – it involved characters that could be commanded, looked after and examined for their attributes and desires. It also had lots of objects to collect and use, each one assigned a weight so that you would have to figure just what you could carry at any one time. But it went beyond merely picking up and using items and it gave players a wealth of options via a series of intuitive sub-windows. It was, in short, quite spellbinding.



Finders Keepers

- **PUBLISHER:** MASTERTRONIC
- **YEAR:** 1985 ■ **GENRE:** ARCADE ADVENTURE

VALUE 7 FOR MONEY

***Finders Keepers'* strength** was in its bright, colourful visuals but it was also a watershed moment for budget games. Far from being a simple collect-'em-up, it engaged the mind, allowing players to find items which could be combined to create something new and engage in a spot of bartering.

Richard Hewison, former employee of Firebird Software



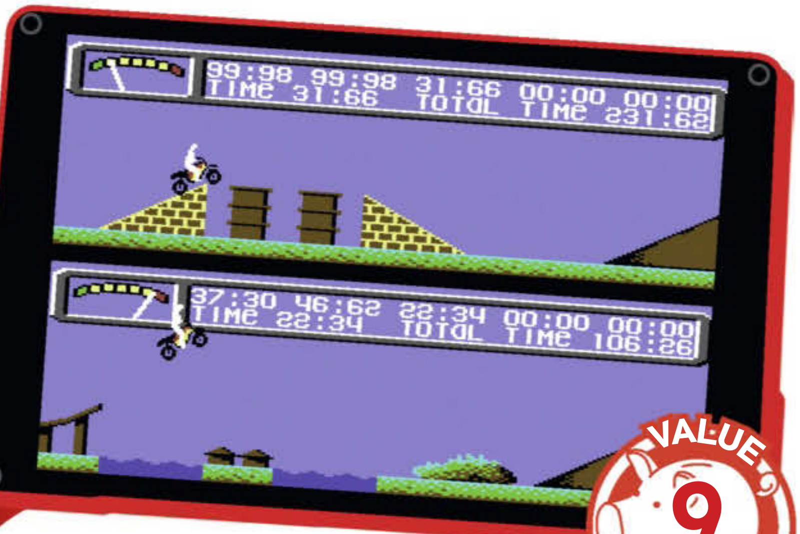
Why did Firebird produce budget games?
At the time, BT felt that too many games costing up to £8 were too expensive, and that you'd sell more titles at a low price than at a higher RRP. I think they also wanted to take on Mastertronic who were pretty much unchallenged at that point in the industry at that budget price range.

Were they given the same level of attention as a full-price game, do you think?
Depends what you mean by attention. At the start, TelecomSoft only published budget titles so they got 100 per cent of the attention of the small number of staff who worked on the range.

What impact did budget games have on the videogame market?
Can't say to be honest. Budget would have put a dent in some publisher's sales for sure (especially after the Christmas 1983 crash) but original budget games began to disappear once publishers saw budget as a way of re-selling older back catalogue at a cheaper price.

Was there ever a sense that budget games were inferior or did people tend to know which publishers would provide quality?
Some budget games were better than some full-price titles (*Thrust* springs to mind) but some budget titles were pretty awful it has to be said as well. Quality varied within each publishers range, let alone between different publishers in the budget market.

What were your favourite Firebird budget games?
Thrust, *Booty*, *Chimera*, *Galax-I-Birds*, *I, Ball*, *Seabase Delta* and *Willow Pattern*.



Kikstart II

- **PUBLISHER:** MASTERTRONIC
- **YEAR:** 1987 ■ **GENRE:** RACING

This game was based on the BBC's *Kick Start* motorbike trials programme (it even had the gnarly theme tune) and was a roaring success. At its best with two players, it let gamers compete over 24 obstacle-ridden courses and it had plenty for players to think about, from mud that slowed bikes down to ramps, gates and steps to navigate. Graphics had been improved from the original game and the side-on view worked well, allowing for the screen to be split, and the controls of the bike, while difficult at first to pick up, rewarded players once they were mastered. What made this game stand out even more, though, was its creative side. Being able to design your own courses – something fans of the original had been crying out for – was a masterstroke. All for £1.99 too.



Booty

- **PUBLISHER:** FIREBIRD
- **YEAR:** 1984 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

***Booty* was Firebird's** launch title… and what a start. This was a platform game with a puzzle element that was a unique spin on the key-collecting mechanic. Players had to collect a numbered key, which correlated to a particular numbered door but it required a lot of thought. Collecting the wrong key at the wrong time could leave you trapped with an enemy bearing down on you.

The sound was abysmal and annoying but a volume switch solved what was perhaps the only bad part of the game. Making players collect keys meant each screen took quite a while to solve and it maximised the value for money people got. Throw in a few bombs and lots of booty to collect and you had yourself a low-cost all-time classic.

David Darling, founder of Codemasters



Why did you decide to publish budget rather than full-price games?
Games were costing around £4.99 and £5.99 and 25 years ago that was really expensive. As programmers we wanted to make really, really high quality games but we wanted them to be affordable and to be available to as many people as possible.

Why do you think the budget games model worked well for some publishers?
It's because we had a bigger audience. Our games had numbers on them so people started to collect them. We also had brands like the simulator range: *Grand Prix*, *Pro-Ski* and *BMX*. People would collect that brand. We had Quattro too where you would get four games for the price of one and that was great value.

Did you see the full-price publishers as competition?
I don't think the games [of full-price publishers] were necessarily of a better quality. The budget market expanded and expanded and it became a problem for the full-price publishers, which then set up their own budget labels. They would basically make a full-price game, sell it for a few months or a year and then release it cheaper, but we were making new games at budget prices and more people were interested in the new games.

Did developers cut corners when making budget games?
The process of development was the same for us because we didn't care about the price of the game – if it was a skiing game then we wanted to make the best skiing game and if it was a rally game, then the same applied. Marketing was where the difference lay. If, say, Ocean made a game like *Daley Thompson's Decathlon* it would have to pay for that licence and for advertising. A lot of their money got used up that way which is why the games were not necessarily any better or had bigger development budgets.

So Codemasters didn't just 'knock out' budget games?
No. We were striving to create the highest quality we could because we were programmers who loved games, so from a creative point of view we wanted to create fantastic games. Our slogan was 'Absolutely Brilliant'. That's what was on the games and we really believed that and wanted to make that quality. If a game was crap, word would spread around the playground really quickly and people wouldn't buy it.



BMX Simulator

- **PUBLISHER:** CODEMASTERS
- **YEAR:** 1986 ■ **GENRE:** RACING

***BMX Simulator* was** one of umpteen Codemasters games with the word 'simulator' in it. Played from a top-down perspective, it was a fiddly game but huge fun. Tapping away at the keys or making small movements on the joystick would cause the palms of players to sweat knowing they were a millimetre or so from skidding or colliding with some misplaced part of the scenery, forcing them off their bike and seeing their opponent – human or computer – race away.

But the sense of exhilaration when you could then replay the whole race and choose to slo-mo the best bits was worth the near coronary it caused. Three laps and a triumph was enough to keep going through the seven courses, yet speed was essential since the clock ticked to a tight limit. The graphics were tiny but the animations were spot on and players always wanted that extra go.



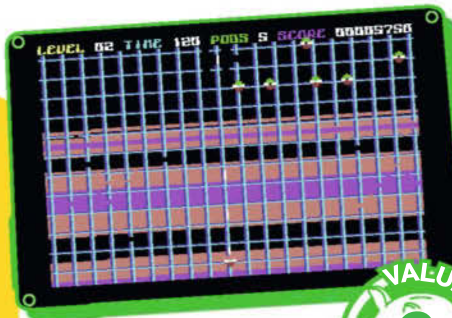
Ste Pickford, games artist



Why were budget games important in the Eighties and early Nineties?
When home videogames first appeared on the likes of the original Atari console and the Intellivision, they were way too expensive for mass adoption. They were niche items that only the relatively well-off could afford. Even the first home computers had games that cost £5 or more, which was a struggle for most kids to afford so games were either pirated or were rare purchases for Christmas or birthdays. Budget games – games at pocket-money prices – went a long way to making videogames more mainstream.

Which games did you most enjoy writing?
I think *Zub* was probably the most enjoyable of the budget games I made because we felt like we were free to make a good game for most of the development time, even if we weren't given the time to finish it off properly in the end. I enjoyed *Feud* a lot as well, particularly the Amiga version, as drawing graphics in 16 colours using Deluxe Paint and with loads of memory was a massive step up from working on a Spectrum or Amstrad which I was doing at the same time.

Did you have a different approach to budget titles?
Where I worked – a studio called Binary Design – there was no difference whatsoever between our approach to budget games and full-price games. Individual teams might get a full-price £9.99 game for one project or a budget £1.99 game for their next. The team would be identical, the deadline identical, and the approach identical. If anything, the budget games might have got a little bit more love as we were more often free to make the game we wanted and less likely to have a concept dictated to us from the publisher. We used to laugh (and get annoyed) at the reviews, as we'd regularly see slightly lower review scores for our budget games and read reviewers say that marks were knocked off because our budget games were clearly a bit lower quality than a full-price game.



POD (Proof Of Destruction)

Value for money: 8

- **PUBLISHER:** MASTERTRONIC
- **YEAR:** 1987 **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

Hated by some (*Crash* gave it 21 per cent and called it "a very poor shoot-'em-up"), *POD* fared better on the Commodore 16 and 64. It was a well-paced, simple shoot-'em-up that allowed players to move spaceships on a grid, blasting the enemy away to get to the next level while ensuring any damage to the grid didn't hamper your progress too much.

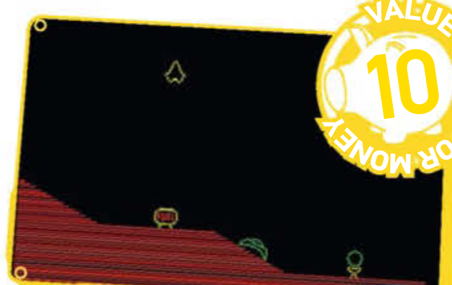
There were 25 levels in total, each with a time limit and each instantly playable. There were bonus screens too. It had echoes of *Centipede* and *Gridrunner* and, while it wasn't much to look at, the action and number of levels gave it the lastability *Crash* claimed it lacked. The two-player option made it a contest and provided a lot of simplistic fun, all played out to a cool beat.

Thrust

- **PUBLISHER:** SUPERIOR SOFTWARE
- **YEAR:** 1986 **GENRE:** ARCADE

Inspired by *Gravitar*, this was a 2D blaster based on gravity. The idea was to locate and grab hold of a sphere and take it up into the air as far as you could go without being blasted into pieces and without colliding into any objects. From that premise grew a compelling game with realistic physics that would dry your eyes as you stared at the screen in concentration.

There was little to fault with *Thrust*. It was difficult – you had to make sure you had enough fuel, shoot and watch out for obstacles – but that was the fun. There were loads of levels to get through and it was an inspired move by the developer to take the first six and then reverse the gravity, and then later have invisible walls and so on. It lengthened the game and made you wonder just what would be thrown at you next.



Value for money: 10

Powerplay: The Game Of The Gods

- **PUBLISHER:** ARCANA
- **YEAR:** 1988 **GENRE:** QUIZ

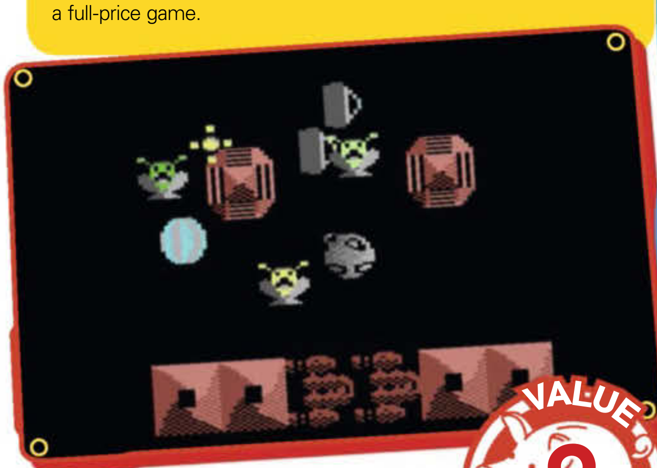
***Powerplay* was a** great-looking quiz-based board game, which allowed up to four gamers to compete. The game progressed via a series of questions. Getting them right meant a player could move to another square.

Each square was colour coordinated, corresponding to a particular type of question. These included sports and leisure, science and technology and geography. So far, so *Trivial Pursuit*.

But there was a good dollop of battling involved with *Powerplay*. If a player wanted to grab a space occupied by an opponent, he or she would become an attacker. Correct answers to questions would have to be given in order to take over the spot and wipe the opponent character off the board. An incorrect answer would see their own health deteriorate and potentially lead to their own obliteration. A true battle of minds with a Greek mythology overtone.

Value for money: 8



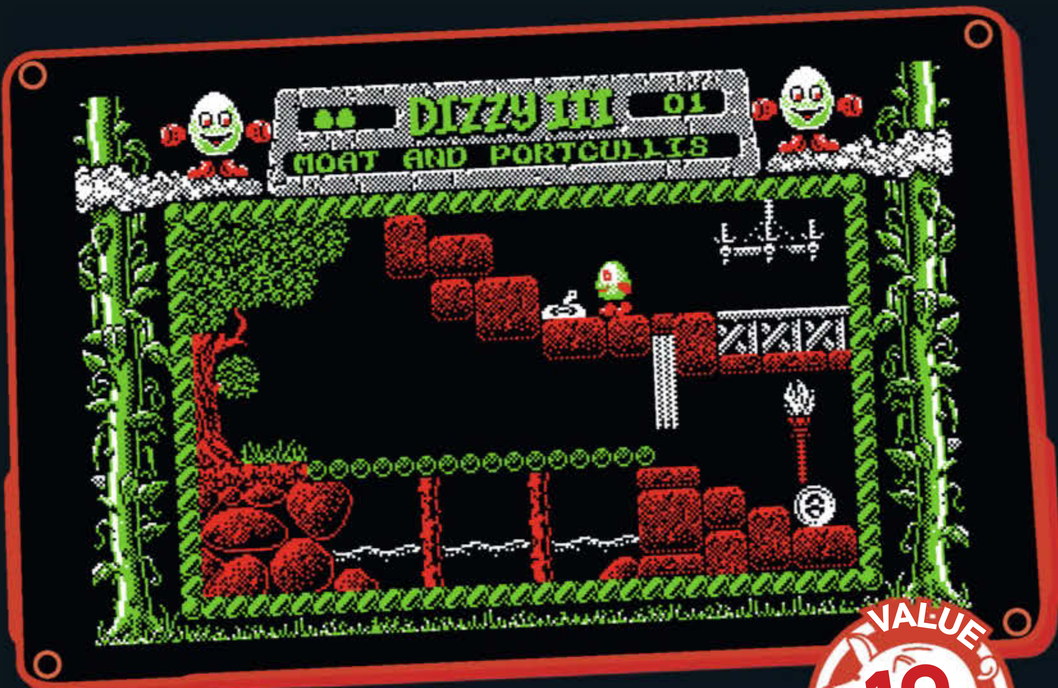


Value for money: 8

I, Ball

- **PUBLISHER:** FIREBIRD
- **YEAR:** 1985 **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

The digitised speech – remember the *I, Ball* yelp? – helped draw gamers into a frantic, vertically-scrolling, single-player shoot-'em-up starring a ball that could be enhanced with extra features. Spread over 16 fiendish screens packed with enemy microwave ovens and Polo mints, its presentation was akin to a full-pricer.





Fantasy World Dizzy

■ **PUBLISHER:** CODEMASTERS ■ **YEAR:** 1989 ■ **GENRE:** ARCADE ADVENTURE

Dizzy's first outing in 1987 had been a slow burner. Its sales only really began to take off when *Treasure Island Dizzy* was released a year later, creating a playground buzz around one of gaming's most eggs-cellent characters (there has to be one such joke, please indulge us).

Those two games, however, ensured a willing and eager audience for this, the third game in the series – a budget game that fixed the issues people had with the previous pair, most notably the one life that made *Treasure Island Dizzy* so frustratingly difficult. In doing so earned it many a top review mark.

Fantasy World Dizzy handed gamers three lives and improved the inventory system but it also introduced the Yolk Folk. Conversations between Dizzy and his fellow eggs brought fresh life to the series, driving the narrative – as flimsy as it may have been – towards a beautiful end that saw love interest Daisy rescued from Zak's cloud-tower.

The music may have been repetitive and mind-numbing and had many a gamer reaching for the volume, but the graphics on all formats had that cutesy cartoon feel that compelled the player to explore and absorb themselves into the digital land before them. It also provided a sub-challenge – the need to find and collect 30 gold coins, some of them obvious but some in the most difficult of places. It gave the game an extra sense of length but it also showed that someone cared about the experience.

What it also did was provide many talking points. How, for instance, would you make use of a cute pigmy cow and can you really pick up a large round hole? Players would discuss the various puzzles they encountered and the characters they interacted with. They would relish surprise moments such as the eyebrow-raising punishment they could dish out to poor Dozy, finding he could be booted into the water if the player kicked his deckchair four times.

The size and polish of the game combined with its ambition was quite at odds with its price tag (something Codemasters came to realise: a later game, *Crystal Kingdom Dizzy* entered the full-price arena and *Fantastic Dizzy* upped the price for a console release). It wasn't for everyone. The magazines at the time seemed to love and hate *Dizzy* in equal measure. The budget price, however, allowed it to seep into the minds of young players putting their parents' hard-earned spare change to good use. It may sound uncool today but parents didn't mind children playing *Dizzy* and the kids secretly adored the games anyway.

Co-creator Philip Oliver confirms this. He remembers walking into Leamington on a busy Saturday afternoon with his then-girlfriend (now wife) and entering WHSmith. "I looked across the shelf and pulled out *Dizzy*," he says. "Immediately a lad standing there said, 'that's brilliant, that is, you should get it'." It was the most successful of all of the *Dizzy* games.



Standout moments

Philip Oliver tells us why he feels Fantasy World Dizzy was so loved

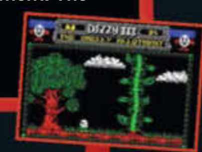
The cover

With the *Dizzy* series we were attempting to create a magical world of adventure and mystery that the player could explore and solve. The cover by Alistair Graham was a classic. It absolutely captured the spirit of fun and adventure that lay within.



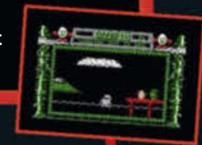
Jack And The Beanstalk

We wrote *Fantasy World Dizzy* in 30 days – starting on 1 September 1989 and finishing it by the end of the month. It was very efficient development. The series of puzzles inspired by *Jack And The Beanstalk* worked brilliantly.



Yolk Folk

The introduction of the Yolk Folk family was a favourite of mine. The game was designed to be bright, fun with new surprises around every corner and with this we were able to design a really interesting story that found lasting appeal.



The dragon

We were able to be ambitious with *Fantasy World Dizzy* and so we thought of these magical things to include. The processors were very slow, meaning plotting graphics to the screen was limited, but we pulled off some great things.



Upside down

The well to the upside-down world where a shopkeeper appears was a nice touch, we feel. But what we love about *Fantasy World Dizzy* is that it captivated hundreds of thousands of people and 25 years on people still remember *Dizzy* fondly.



WILLOW

■ **Developer:** Capcom ■ **Year:** 1989 ■ **Genre:** Platformer

■ **Capcom could have adapted Lucasfilm's sword and sorcery epic *Willow* in any number of ways; the film's multi-layered plot certainly offers enough high-tempo set pieces and backstory. Ultimately, it chose to develop an RPG to fulfil its NES licence and to stick to a formula that had served it well on past arcade fantasy-themed projects by making the coin-op *Willow* a demanding run-and-gun platformer.**

Those familiar with Capcom's earlier hack-and-slash romps *Ghosts 'N Goblins* and *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* will immediately feel at home in *Willow*'s colourful side-scrolling world. That's not to say that the game mirrors its predecessors aesthetically or in terms of level design – *Willow* has its own look and layouts – but it does owe a debt to those titles for some of its core mechanics. Other than the feel and weighting of the stages featuring the game's eponymous hero Willow – his knightly aide Madmartigan plays slightly differently – Capcom made sure that *Willow* brought in the coins.

There are cheap deaths that get triggered at exactly the same points in the game each run through, which are avoidable once you know to look out for them, and bosses that require finely-honed techniques to overcome. But these are more forewarnings than criticisms; if you go into *Willow* expecting tough platforming you won't be disappointed.

Those hoping for a faithful adaptation of the film may be less happy, but Willow's coin-op outing does at least pay lip-service to the movie's plot and allows the player to take the role of each main hero on alternate levels. As mentioned, the stages played as Willow feel a lot like Capcom's *Ghost* games, but paradoxically, the levels featuring failed knight Madmartigan play far less like one of Arthur's quests. The difference is that Madmartigan keeps a firm hold of his sword, meaning that he can only attack at close quarters. It's a subtle change to the established gameplay, but a welcome one that adds variety. The film's villains are the game's later bosses, with lead-antagonist the evil witch Bauvmorda accounting for Willow's final and stiffest challenge.

An explanation for Capcom favouring an RPG *Willow* for the NES over a coin-op conversion may be that it was playing to the strengths of two markets, but this decision actually provides the best of both worlds.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

GHOULS 'N GHOSTS 1988

On balance, *Willow* is probably more like *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* than the less graphically advanced *Ghosts 'N Goblins*. *Ghouls* inspired several decent home versions but the Mega Drive version is arguably the most accomplished.





» It may not be a completely faithful adaptation of the film, but *Willow* does allow you to take the role of each main hero on alternate levels.

» *Willow* feels a lot like Capcom's *Ghosts* games, but paradoxically, the levels featuring failed knight Madmartigan play far less like one of Arthur's quests.

» Capcom made sure that, like its *Ghosts* series, *Willow* brought in the coins. Cheap deaths get triggered at the same points in the game each run through, though.

» Those familiar with Capcom's ghostly hack-and-slash romps will feel at home in *Willow*'s colourful side-scrolling world, but the game has it's own unique look.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

SLIPSTREAM

■ **Developer:** Capcom ■ **Year:** 1995 ■ **Genre:** Racer

■ ***Slipstream* employed sprite-scaling at a time when the expectation was that coin-op racers should be predominantly polygon-powered.** Of course, the game's dated look could easily be forgiven if it excelled on the gameplay front, but unfortunately this just isn't the case. That's not to say *Slipstream* isn't without merit; everything rattles along at an impressive speed and the slipstream mechanic of the title – a power meter that rewards consistent driving with short speed boosts – is a nice touch. But after a few laps the game starts to run out of ideas. Admittedly, *Slipstream*'s Formula One theme does limit its options a little – hills and forking roads would have been outwith the developers' remit. But more could have been done to add some much needed variety. For the most part, *Slipstream*'s demands are simply that you negotiate straights and bends through sparse poorly-defined scenery. You occasionally see a cluster of pixels on your horizon as you catch up to other drivers, but it's a case of blink and you miss them when you overtake. In short, *Slipstream* lacks depth, and this was probably as much of a factor in it not making it home as its dated graphics.



ARMORED WARRIORS

■ **Developer:** Capcom ■ **Year:** 1994 ■ **Genre:** Scrolling Fighter


» [Arcade] *Armored Warriors* offers a varied selection of heavy metal brawlers to take into battle.

■ ***Armored Warriors*, or *Powered Gear – Strategic Variant Armor Equipment*, to give it its grander Japanese title, is an interesting side-scrolling fighter with mecha combatants.** Mecha are defined as robots controlled by human pilots, a concept Capcom makes the most of by offering the player a varied selection of heavy metal brawlers to take into battle. However, *Armored Warriors*' key mechanic is that you can upgrade your fighter with the weapons of your fallen opponents. Crucially, the game's developers outdid themselves when they designed the eclectic suite of bolt-ons that are available – there's everything from tank chassis to laser samurai swords – and in multiplayer rumbles you often find yourself arguing over the coolest upgrades. *Armored Warriors* also boasts accomplished pixel art and a suitably upbeat soundtrack. So why wasn't it converted? The most likely reason is that by 1994 side-scrolling fighters had largely given way to versus fighters with outrageous casts and special moves. But with Nineties trends a mere memory, there's no reason not to give *Armored Warriors* a recommendation.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

CYBERBOTS: FULLMETAL MADNESS 1995

Perhaps giving in to popular demand, Capcom made *Armored Warriors*' sequel a versus fighter. All the mecha from the first game are present, though, and it was ported to the Saturn and PlayStation so it makes for a suitable alternative.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

MEGA TWINS 1990

Nemo's dream-like qualities and hybrid gameplay can be found in another of Capcom's early Nineties titles *Mega Twins*. This was converted to various consoles and computers, with the PC-Engine CD offering the most faithful version.



NEMO

■ **Developer:** Capcom ■ **Year:** 1990 ■ **Genre:** Platformer

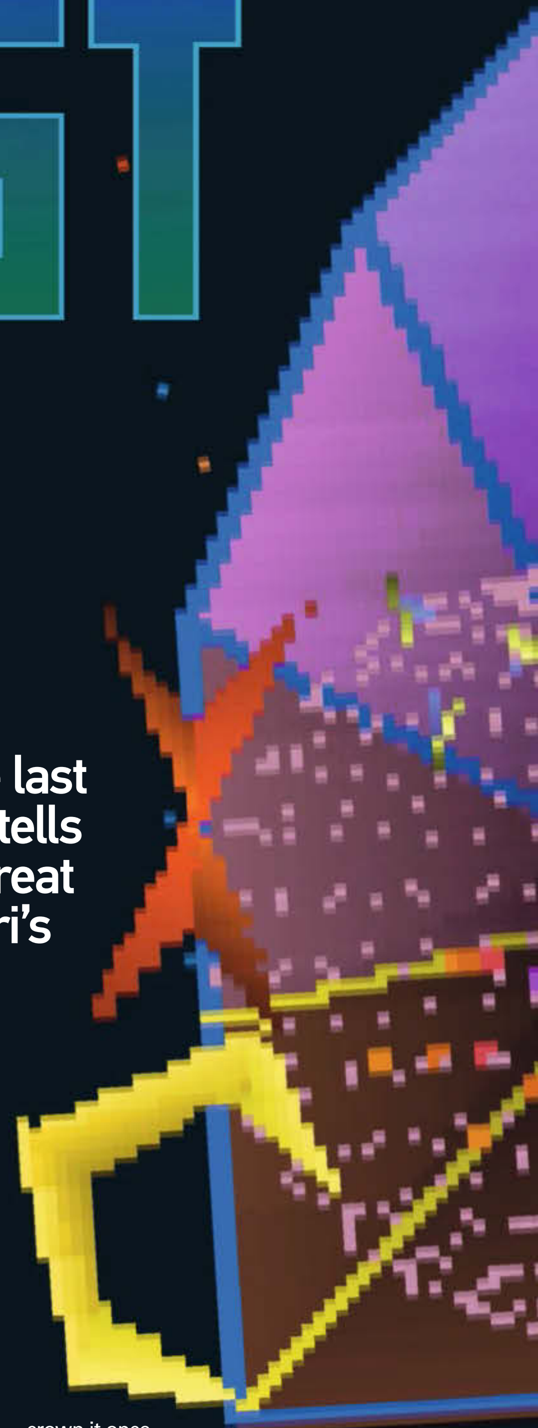
■ **Based on Windsor McKay's surreal early 20th Century comic strip – by way of a much later animated film by Tokyo studio TMS – *Nemo* is Capcom's coin-op take on *Little Nemo In Slumberland*.** Not to be confused with its NES effort – *Little Nemo: The Dream Master* – *Nemo* is more a run-and-gun/platformer hybrid than a pure platformer like its console counterpart. Taking full advantage of the dream-based setting of *Nemo*'s world, Capcom's designers clearly let their imaginations run wild when creating the game's imaginative stages. Being as Nemo is a child, the dangers in each level come from wayward toys, power-ups are sweets and your method of defence is a magic gold sceptre rather than a realistic weapon. As you would expect from a Nineties Capcom licensed property,


» [Arcade] Capcom's designers clearly let their imaginations run wild when creating *Nemo*'s imaginative stages.

Nemo's colourful and creative design is complimented by solid gameplay. And although the game isn't as rock-hard as some earlier Capcom titles it isn't a pushover either. *Nemo* is a joy to play, though. So presumably, a NES-exclusive *Nemo* was preferred to an arcade conversion because the hardware advantages the coin-op had just were too great.

TEMPEST 2000

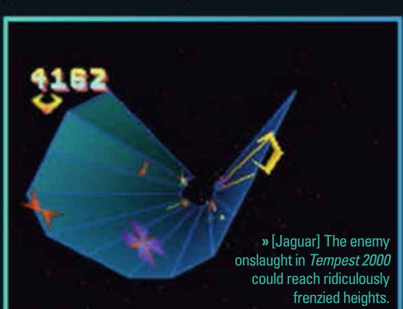
Wired magazine described Jeff Minter as "the last great Atari cartridge programmer". Here, he tells Paul Drury all about the creation of his last great cartridge and his abiding obsession with Atari's colour vector classic





IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** ATARI
» **DEVELOPER:** JEFF MINTER
» **RELEASED:** 1994
» **PLATFORM:** JAGUAR
» **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP



» [Jaguar] The enemy onslaught in *Tempest 2000* could reach ridiculously frenzied heights.

Jeff Minter grins across the table at us, wiping Guiness froth from his top lip. "I can remember the moment when I first saw *Tempest* exactly. It was the early Eighties and I was in London with my mum and dad. They went off shopping and I was wandering around Piccadilly Circus. It started to rain so I nipped into an arcade and I saw this machine glowing in the corner. It looked like nothing I'd seen before, [with] these gorgeous colour vectors. I dropped a few coins in and that was that; it was just so addictive..."

It was the start of a very long love affair. Written by Dave Theurer and released by Atari in 1981, *Tempest* would become one of Jeff's all-time favourite games and he even acquired a coin-op machine so he could bring the arcade experience home. However, despite releasing many 8-bit titles through his Llamasoft label that were inspired by arcade hits – *Gridrunner* and *Andes Attack* were clearly homages to *Centipede* and *Defender* respectively – he never attempted to interpret *Tempest* for the home micros of the day. "It's so pure and distinctive looking, if you tried to do *Tempest* with pixels you ended up with something that looked like a spider's web made of Lego bricks," he explains. "If you've ever seen the VCS prototype, it looks like a pair of stripy tights with a prawn on them!"

So Jeff left his beloved blaster well alone until 1992, when he found himself in London again, sitting in a conference organised by Atari to get developers interested in making games for their forthcoming Jaguar console. "They literally read out a list of game IP they owned and asked who was interested in doing what," he recalls with a chuckle. "When they got to *Tempest*, I just put my hand up. I'll have that!"

It seems a rather haphazard way for Atari to decide who would develop which titles for its latest attempt to regain the console crown it once wore, but we like to think Atari saw Jeff's outstretched arm, thrust upward with the enthusiasm of a seven year-old volunteering to be football captain, and knew he was the right man for the job. The company flew him over to the States to show him the hardware, assigned him a producer and sent him back home to Wales with a prototype Jaguar.

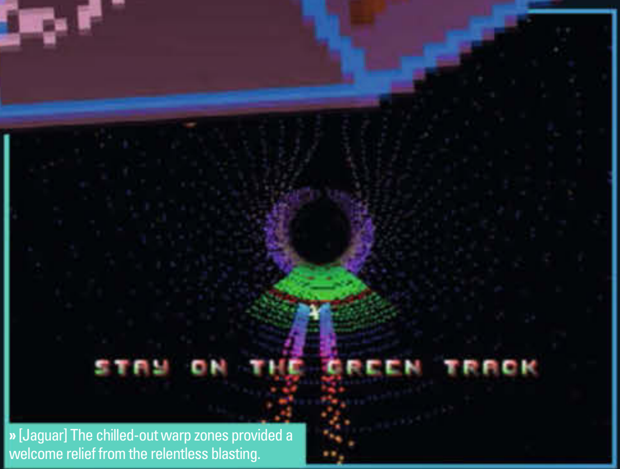
"It didn't take me too long to get the Jag doing unfilled vectors and a simple version of the original working," recalls Jeff. "I was



> **"Atari read out a list of game IP they owned and when they got to Tempest, I just put my hand up. I'll have that!"**
>
> Jeff knows if you don't ask, you don't get…



» [Jaguar] Jeff let his imagination run free when it came to web design, including some very curvaceous levels.



» [Jaguar] The chilled-out warp zones provided a welcome relief from the relentless blasting.

inclined to leave it like that as I liked the look but my producer John gently said, 'we'd really like you to fill those vectors up'. So I did. And he was right."

Jeff used a technique called 'Gouraud shading', a function built into the Jaguar's hardware, which gave the game's polygons a colourful, three-dimensional feel. It also allowed him to bring his own distinctive aesthetic to the project whilst remaining faithful to Theurer's original vision. "I didn't want to shit on Dave's ideas by filling it full of llamas," blurts out Jeff. "It was quite a daunting thing to take what I consider to be one of the best designed games I'd ever seen and bolt stuff onto it. I really didn't want to upset Dave by chucking in a load of random stuff."

Being true to your source material without slavishly aping it and extending a game concept whilst never forgetting what made it great in the first place is a demanding task, and one that has confounded many developers charged with updating a classic title. Jeff approached this difficult balancing act by keeping the spirit of *Tempest* alive – the frenetic blasting and web-like structure of levels – whilst introducing a whole host of new power-ups and enemies to the fray. The friendly firepower of AI droids could help fight off the relentless stream of foes and the ability to jump off the edge of a web was handy when overwhelmed by the onslaught, which now included the horn-hurling Demon Head and the fiendish Mirror, a nasty piece of work that reflected your shots right back at you. "They were designed to be right bastards," cackles Jeff.

All this frenzied action was accompanied by a banging techno soundtrack, which complimented the melting visuals and particle fireworks on-screen beautifully. "The audio guys were f***ing fantastic," beams Jeff. "I sent them a video of me playing the game with some music that had the feel I wanted. I'd just been introduced to techno and industrial stuff ▶



and I think the game needed that vibe. A few weeks later I got back an audio tape with tracks they were working on and I was blown away. I had to phone them up and say, 'this is awesome but will it really sound like this on my Jaguar?' They were true to their word – it was the best f***ing music for a game ever!"

The excellent work of those audio guys at Imagitec would later be released as a standalone CD, and remains a fine testament to the contribution music can play to the gaming experience. The sensory overload *Tempest 2000* offered was spread across 100 levels – one more than the original – and a number of different game options including a traditional version and an innovative if squint-inducing Duel mode. And then there were the mellow warp sections interspersed between the madness. "I liked the juxtaposition of going from really hard action to a floaty, trancey vibe," smiles Jeff. "They were a little chill pill."

Released in 1994, *Tempest 2000* was to be the Jaguar's finest title…

"I'd put a word in for *Alien Vs Predator* and *Iron Soldier*," interrupts Jeff, modestly.

We laugh and acknowledge that fine pair but then wonder whether, in retrospect, Jeff would have traded the honour of producing one of the best titles on the short-lived Jaguar in exchange for reaching a far wider audience for his game if he'd developed it for the PlayStation? He thinks a while before answering.

"It's satisfying to think *Tempest 2000* is perhaps one of the best games on the entire console, but I just wish the console itself had been more successful, then I would've got more royalties! I don't regret doing it on the Jag at all, though. I know on a few occasions I've backed the wrong hardware horse but I've always enjoyed myself because the thing that drives me is learning new things on new hardware, to have a prototype and be on the cutting edge of something. Even when it hasn't worked out, like with the Nuon, the coding I did on that was fantastic!"

Ah yes, the Nuon. Six years after *Tempest 2000*, Jeff joined VM Labs to work on a bespoke DVD chip that could also play games. The company had been founded by ex-Atari employees who managed to sort out the legal shenanigans for Jeff to produce a version of *Tempest* for their forthcoming Nuon console. "It was to be a flagship title," he recalls proudly. "I said, if you get the rights, I'll give it a crack!"

The result was *Tempest 3000*, which journeyed further down the psychedelic path first trodden by its predecessor. "I wanted it to be even more trippy and have the kinds of effects I'd been developing for a visualiser," says Jeff, as he sips another Guinness. "It was fantastically interesting hardware. I grew up as an assembler programmer and have always loved being able to have complete control of a machine. These days, you can't engage with the nitty gritty of the hardware. The Nuon was the last glorious days of that machine language coding."

"I didn't want to shit on Dave Theurer's original ideas by filling Tempest 2000 full of llamas"

Jeff would save his favourite ungulates for Space Giraffe

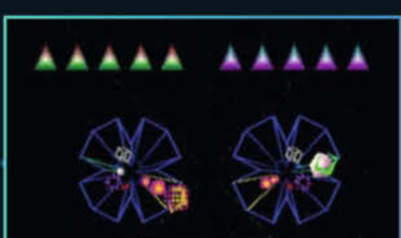


DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SHEEP IN SPACE (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: C64
YEAR: 1984

BATALYX
SYSTEM: C64
YEAR: 1985

TXK
SYSTEM: PS VITA
YEAR: 2013



» [Jaguar] The two-player Duel Mode was innovative, but tracking your opponent was a challenge in itself.



» [Nuon] For all its flaws, *Tempest 3000* is the best game on the Nuon console… though there are only seven others.

YOU SPIN ME ROUND

Creating Tempest 2000 without an arcade spinner

One of the joys of playing *Tempest* on an original arcade cabinet is the spinner that allows your ship to whip round the edge of the web at dizzying speeds. Jeff was well aware of how the *Tempest 2000* experience could be improved by such a controller for the Jaguar. "As development on the game was ending, there was talk at Atari that maybe someday, someone, if not them, might make a rotary controller," he recalls. "So I made one up myself by hacking a paddle controller from the VCS and put some code in to support any rotary controller based on that design. A few years later, someone did modify a Jag controller to use it!" Search for 'Chaos Reigns' or 'T2K Commander' and you'll see for yourself…



» For true *Tempest 2000* fans, try playing it with the T2K Commander [left] or the Chaos Reigns rotary controller.

UPDATING A CLASSIC

Tempest 2000 wasn't the only coin-op to inspire a Llamasoft title. Here, Jeff looks back on his highs and lows



GRIDRUNNER

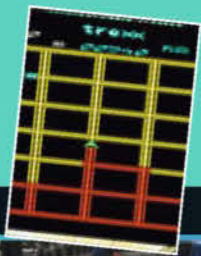
ORIGINAL FORMAT: VIC-20 (1982)
INSPIRED BY: CENTIPEDE

■ I did good here! It began as a way of avoiding copyright issues with Atari but it grew into its own thing and stands on its own merits now. The update I've done is really nice, I think.

TRAXX

ORIGINAL FORMAT: VIC-20 (1983)
INSPIRED BY: AMIDAR

■ I didn't do so well with this. The controls are a bit crappy. It was difficult to go round corners and that should never be hard in a maze game. That's a fundamental flaw! I put it all down to my inexperience.





LLAMATRON – ROBOTRON

ORIGINAL FORMAT: ATARI ST (1991)
INSPIRED BY: ROBOTRON

■ I love *Llamatron*. *Robotron* is designed to kill you as fast as it can but I wanted a game that was more of a journey. When you get good you can have a good half an hour game.

DEFENDER 2000

ORIGINAL FORMAT: JAGUAR (1995)
INSPIRED BY: DEFENDER

■ I'm kind of ambivalent on this one. The psychedelic version, *Defender Plus*, contains the seeds of where I wanted to go but my producers at Atari pushed me in a different direction.





MINOTAUR RESCUE

ORIGINAL FORMAT: iOS (2011)
INSPIRED BY: ASTEROIDS

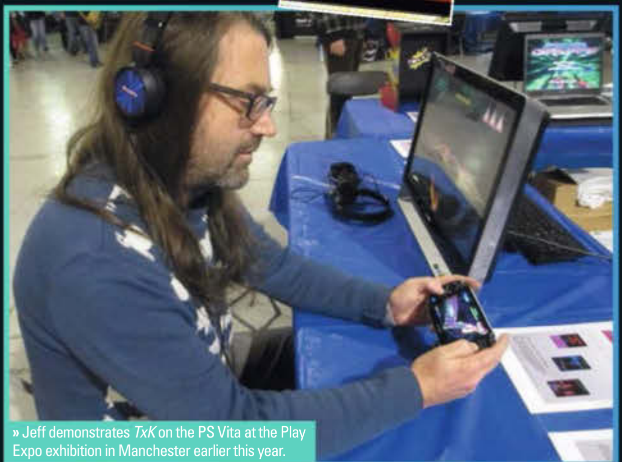
■ This was the start of the whole Minotaur project of making games in the style of classic titles. I tried to imagine what a game designer back then might do with the *Asteroids* idea.

FIVE A DAY

ORIGINAL FORMAT: iOS (2012)
INSPIRED BY: TIME PILOT

■ It's like a new age version of *Time Pilot* with fruit. I've kept the spirit but softened it so it's nowhere near as hard. You can cruise through the early levels but that fits with the chill-out theme.





» Jeff demonstrates *TxK* on the PS Vita at the Play Expo exhibition in Manchester earlier this year.

We nod and smile as Jeff eulogises about the difficulties in parallel processing, real-time code overlays and how many operations you could manage per tick. "It was a very complicated dance," he grins, "but for an assembler nerd like me, fantastically satisfying."

Tempest 3000 was also a pretty complicated dance for players, as they tried to skip between the myriad of foes and fiery projectiles bursting from the abyss. The blur of glowing vectors and layers of visual trickery are a joy to behold, but deciphering what's actually going on in the midst of the maelstrom can be bewildering. It was just too much for some, and we cheekily quote fellow **Retro Gamer** freelancer Stuart Campbell, who describes the game on his site as "over-indulgent" and "an undisciplined mess".

"The visual overload is part of the difficulty of the game," protests Jeff. "Learning to read everything through all the psychedelia is part of the challenge.



» [Jaguar]The boxart for *Tempest 2000* had a sweet hand-drawn look, very much in keeping with Llamasoft's 8-bit back catalogue.

When you can do that, it's quite an exhilarating feeling, being able to deconstruct an intense visual display and see the cues, because they're always there. I've had the same thing said about *Space Giraffe*. Some people seem to be actively offended if you do that, like it's not a legitimate direction to go in."

We try to calm the waters by adding that our Stu really loved *Tempest 2000*, *Tempest X3* and *Space Giraffe* but Jeff shakes his head. "Why I don't take his review too seriously is that he said it was bad coding. Well, if he ever sits down to programme a VMW parallel assembler system, I'd be very interested to see what he comes up with…"

Jeff does acknowledge the framerate problems with *Tempest 3000* and speaks of his frustration at the mixed reception for *Space Giraffe*, which has become something of a 'Marmite' game, even for devotees of his work. He talks about revisiting *Tempest 2000* as part of his Minotaur project for iOS devices and even hints at a scientology theme. As he finishes his pint, we conclude that Jeff's affection for *Tempest* remains undiminished.

That was earlier this year. Then, just before this article was due to be sent to print, we bumped into Jeff at his Llamasoft stand at this year's Play Expo exhibition in Manchester and were delighted to see his new PlayStation Vita project. "It's an unofficial successor to *Tempest 2000*," he says of *TxK*, available to download for just a fiver. "I've always loved the abstract purity of *Tempest*. It isn't trying to emulate anything in the real world, it's just this glorious, geometric web with stuff happening on it and I love that. I felt it was time for me to do my definitive version!"

It's a fine homage to Dave Theurer's seminal blaster, the vectors looking crisp and colourful on the Vita and with a pounding soundtrack composed by volunteers from Llamasoft's 'yakyak' forum. We end by asking Jeff is he's ever met Dave or had any feedback from him on his numerous *Tempest*-inspired titles? He shakes his head, so we explain we are in touch and ask whether he would like us to pass any message on to Mr Theurer on his behalf? He muses over this for a while.

"Just ask him if he thinks I'm a c***," he finally decides.

Many thanks to Jeff, Giles, Martyn, Kieren and Stuart.



» [Jaguar] Almost 20 years old, *Tempest 2000* remains one of the best reasons to own a Jaguar.



» [Jaguar] Though originally created for the Jaguar, a PC version of *Tempest 2000* was released in 1996.



CLASSIC MOMENTS

Sega Marine Fishing

» **PLATFORM:** ARCADE, DREAMCAST, PC » **DEVELOPER:** WOW ENTERTAINMENT » **RELEASED:** 2000

We love *Sega Marine Fishing* and it's not just because it looks beautiful with Sega blue skies and an amazingly jolly soundtrack. No, we love it because it delivers a number of heart-stopping moments that you just wouldn't think were possible from a fishing game. Fishing in real life can be incredibly thrilling when you catch an actual fish, and *Sega Marine Fishing* captures those moments perfectly. It's none more memorable than when you've hooked a suitably big fish like a Sailfin and watch it burst through the brine to fly majestically through the air in a desperate attempt to escape your hook. Don't worry though. We always put them back afterwards. We're good like that.

BIO

Sega Marine Fishing was first released in arcades before getting ported to both Dreamcast and Windows. It's an excellent evolution of the *Sega Bass* series, delivering a bewilderingly diverse range of fish to catch, plenty of unlockable extras and a variety of different locations to fish at. The home ports were particularly memorable, being suitably enhanced over the original arcade game with extras like fun mini-games and the ability to simply free fish to your heart's content. Sadly, *Sega Marine Fishing* only reached American and Japanese Dreamcast owners, meaning there's a great many gamers who have probably never experienced the best fishing game of all time.



MORE SEGA MARINE FISHING MOMENTS

Getting hooked



You'll never forget the first time you hook a fish. There you are cursing your apparent bad luck as fish after fish fails to take interest in your bait. Then, all of a sudden, a critter starts homing in on your hook and you poise ready for the inevitable strike. A quick tug on your rod (you're using a rod right?) and you're ready for a tense battle that either ends in a successful landing or a snapped line.

It's my aquarium, mine!



Catch fish in Free Fishing and you're rewarded with unlocks that range from new clothing and lures, to corals and fish for your aquarium. That's right, you have a gigantic aquarium that slowly fills up with all sorts of goodies as long as you keep catching fish. Once you've got enough you can set a route and leisurely move through its watery depths staring in wonder at what all your fishing exploits have brought you.

Mini-game mania



Mini-games are fun, and Sega knows this. As a result it crammed *Sega Marine Fishing* full of them, delivering five different games that double up as brilliant timewasters in their own right, particularly when played with a group of drunk friends. Casting Training and Fight Training are the best for multiplayer shenanigans, but Lure Action Training, Fishing Training and Total Weight Training shouldn't be ignored either as they all offer endless amounts of fun.

Hidden wonders



One of the best aspects of *Sega Marine Fishing* is the stuff you can discover while you're casually casting your line. The Offing is the best stage for this as it features all sorts of interesting objects and creatures in its murky depths. Submersibles and sunken ruins can be found, but one of the best moments comes when you discover this huge whale, which casually swims by as you reel in your latest catch.

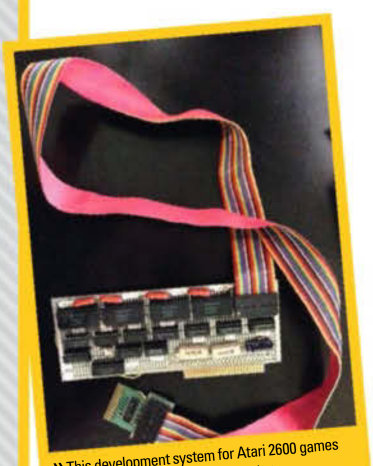
In the chair with...

GARRY KITCHEN

In a long and successful career, Garry Kitchen has been designer, programmer and producer on many great games and is one of the rare breed who got their names above the title. Andrew Fisher talks to Garry about creating his own games and inspiring others with his Game Maker

Garry is philosophical when asked his fondest memories of creating games. "As anyone who loves their job will tell you, when you're doing what you love it doesn't feel like work. I really enjoy the process of starting from nothing and creating a 'world', totally driven by my vision, my rules and my reality of how the world should be. There's nothing better. I've always said that the only thing more fun than playing videogames is making them." From setting up one of the first American NES developers to the AppStore, Garry has created some amazing worlds.

When did you first encounter a computer?
My first exposure to a computer was in college in the 1976-1977 timeframe, when I took a FORTRAN programming class. We had to write the program on a timeshare terminal and submit it to the computer lab, where they would run your code and give you a printout with the result. I didn't get much out of the course and it certainly didn't encourage me to focus on software. That happened later, 'on the job', as I found that programming assembly language on microprocessors was a whole lot more fun that FORTRAN.



» This development system for Atari 2600 games attached to Garry's Apple II computer.

You then got yourself a scholarship to study?
Matsushita/Panasonic wanted to help electrical engineering students who were attending college while working to pay their way through college, as I was. Any EE student in that situation was encouraged to submit an application for the scholarship. Matsushita reviewed the students' applications, grades and I was fortunate enough to be chosen.

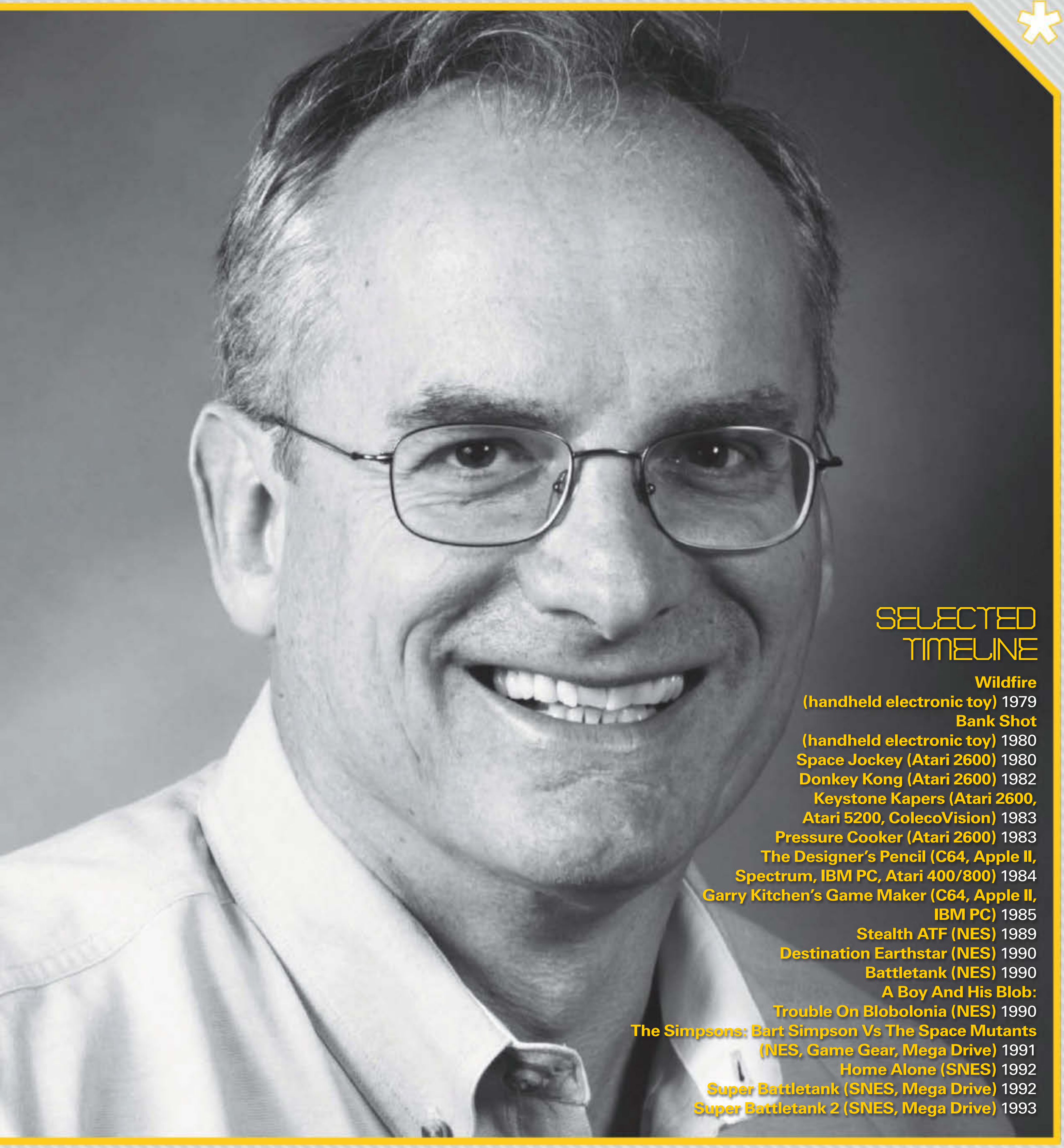
Did you always plan to work with game hardware?
While in college I was offered a part-time job with a small engineering company, Wickstead Design Associates. With no experience, I was 'low man on the totem pole', and started at the bottom, learning how to be a technician, soldering circuit boards, building prototypes etc. Being a small company, my responsibilities quickly increased to the point where I was doing hardware and software design. Our initial work was in general consumer electronics (digital photographic timers, digital instrumentation, digital clocks, etc).

However, in 1977, Mattel released their *Mattel Football* handheld electronic game, and in 1978 *Space Invaders* the arcade game showed up in the local pizza parlour, and I was hooked. We shifted our focus to toys and games, working first in the electronic toy space (Wildfire, Bank Shot for Parker Brothers) and then in the videogame space on the Atari 2600. Since 1977, my focus has remained on interactive electronic entertainment.

What was it like designing handheld games?
The two Parker Brothers products were LED-based, not LCD. We preferred an active light source (LED), rather than a reflective light source (LCD). At the time I thought that LCD displays lacked vibrancy, clarity, brightness and colour. Needless to say, they've improved a lot since then.

I started programming games on a 4-bit microprocessor (the AMI S2000 or the TI TMS 1000), driving a display made up of a matrix of LEDs (I believe 76 in the Bank Shot billiards game). In addition to handling all of the gameplay logic, the code had to strobe the LED display to keep it lit; unlike a bitmap display, you couldn't just turn an LED on and have it stay on. Each LED turned on for a split second, followed by the next and the next etc, under software control. It happened so fast that your eye didn't notice the flicker and it looked like a solid display. Scanning the display in this manner was mandatory if you didn't want to use six AA batteries every hour.

When the Atari 2600 took off and started to seriously hurt the handheld electronic toy market, I jumped over to that platform, which was based on an 8-bit processor (6502/6507). Once again, without a bitmap, the software had to run synchronously with the display, drawing every individual pixel on the screen. It was not that different



SELECTED TIMELINE

Wildfire (handheld electronic toy) 1979
Bank Shot (handheld electronic toy) 1980
Space Jockey (Atari 2600) 1980
Donkey Kong (Atari 2600) 1982
Keystone Kapers (Atari 2600, Atari 5200, ColecoVision) 1983
Pressure Cooker (Atari 2600) 1983
The Designer's Pencil (C64, Apple II, Spectrum, IBM PC, Atari 400/800) 1984
Garry Kitchen's Game Maker (C64, Apple II, IBM PC) 1985
Stealth ATF (NES) 1989
Destination Earthstar (NES) 1990
Battletank (NES) 1990
A Boy And His Blob: Trouble On Blobolonia (NES) 1990
The Simpsons: Bart Simpson Vs The Space Mutants (NES, Game Gear, Mega Drive) 1991
Home Alone (SNES) 1992
Super Battletank (SNES, Mega Drive) 1992
Super Battletank 2 (SNES, Mega Drive) 1993



Garry's senior year project in college got an A – a microprocessor-based portable *Space Invaders* game.

> The smartest thing that Activision did during that time period was to hire brilliant creative people and leave them alone to create

than the standalone, handheld games that I had worked on.

Looking back, I enjoyed designing both electronic toys and videogames. Similar, but different challenges.

In 1980, you reverse-engineered the Atari 2600 to see how it worked. How long did that take?
It took about six months. My brand new Apple II computer was key to the effort; it would have taken much longer without it. While I led the effort, I had help from a brilliant programmer with a PhD in Physics, who worked with me to decode the software routines.

Were you surprised when your first Atari 2600 game, *Space Jockey* sold a million units?



Omni magazine voted Bank Shot one of the Ten Best Toys of the Year in 1980.

While *Space Jockey* was a modestly fun game, it was very simple in concept and gameplay mechanics and was really just a test bed for me during the reverse engineering process. I had to write code to test out how the system worked so I picked a simple game demo with multiple horizontal bands of objects, tailor-made for the 2600 hardware. It was also a 2K game (2048 bytes), so it was pretty limited in graphic and audio complexity (the things that take up more memory).

It was a decent effort given the fact that it was my first game on the platform but it's certainly not a masterpiece. Not to be self-deprecating but I think the majority of those units sold for less than full price.

Then you got to convert *Donkey Kong* to the 2600…
Donkey Kong 2600 was a monster to do. I loved the arcade game when it came out and I was thrilled to get the project to adapt it, but it was a daunting task. After the critical reception that Atari's *Pac-Man* cartridge had got, I felt great pressure to deliver on this next high profile coin-op adaptation. While I had no help from Nintendo I did have direct access to an arcade machine. I could play the arcade game but I didn't have any access to the game resources; graphic frames, sound samples or code.

What made it difficult?
The ramps – the 'background' graphics on the 2600 were incredibly crude, only 40 blocks across with each block made up of four horizontal pixels; ie big and blocky. Even worse, they weren't even 40 unique blocks. The hardware defined 20 blocks (which covered the left side of the screen), and the right side was either a copy of or reflection of the left side. Historically, a 2600 programmer would set a mode switch for copy or reflect, define the 20-block pattern for each line of the screen and forget about it. The hardware would display the right side of the background automatically. If you look at a game like *Combat* you see that the background pattern is either symmetrical or reflective.

My problem was the slanted ramps that the barrels rolled down, requiring a completely unique graphic pattern from the left edge to the right edge. I originally tried flat ramps but it didn't look good enough to me; ie it didn't look like the arcade game. I eventually rewrote my display kernel (the code loop that draws each scan line of the TV image) to load up one 20-block pattern for the left side and a second 20-block pattern for the right side before the television raster reached the centre of the TV screen. By changing the background graphic registers on the fly I was able to create a non-symmetrical display with slanted ramps. It was not easy!

I worked long and hard on the 'feel' so that it played like the original. I obviously worked long and hard to make the graphics look as close as possible to the arcade game.



Cartridge PROG 53 contains the final prototype of The Designer's Pencil for the C64.

Fans have commented on the missing levels…
To clear that up once and for all, given the schedule and the size of the ROM that was available to me, it was impossible to add the two other screens. Despite the fact that bank-switching technology was available and the game could have utilised an 8K ROM, Coleco (the publisher) insisted on a 4K ROM to save money. Despite my best efforts, I was not able to dissuade them. Also, even if I had had an 8K ROM to work with, it would have taken a couple of months more to program the other two levels. I did the entire project in record time (three months), spending the last 72 hours straight (no sleep, no breaks) sitting in a cubicle in Hartford, Connecticut with the owners of Coleco standing over my shoulder waiting for the finished game.

I'm proud of the Atari 2600 version of *Donkey Kong*. I think I did as good a job of converting the arcade game as any programmer could have done, given the limitations I had to live with.

What inspired your next game, *Keystone Kapers*?
After *Donkey Kong*, I was inspired to do another 'little man' game. I was also interested in doing a funny, whimsical character. Many times on a machine with limited graphics capability, the theme is driven by what you can display that looks good. The Keystone Cop worked well graphically because he was recognisable wearing



[Atari 2600] Jumpman races up the diagonal platforms that caused Garry so much work.



» Bob and Holly Doyle developed the prototype of Wildfire, with Garry designing the software.

the signature English Bobby hat. I also had the concept in my head of how to write 2600 code to make an animating escalator. I was always trying to make realistic animations of mechanical contraptions (eg the oven and conveyor belts in *Pressure Cooker*). Once I had the escalator I had to build a game around it and the combination of the Keystone Cop and the escalator lead me to a multi-floor department store and an escaped convict (who also displayed well in a horizontally-striped outfit).

How long did *Pressure Cooker* take to create?

About eight months. I was standing in a Burger King at lunch watching the burgers move by the flame on a conveyor belt and had the idea.

The jingle in *Pressure Cooker* is one of my favourite parts of the game. People asked me how I made it sound so good (ie in tune). The trick was simple. Most of the tones that the Atari 2600 could generate were out of tune and it drove me crazy when designers used them in game music; there's nothing worse than out of tune music. I decided I wanted good sounding music so I brought in an electronic keyboard and went through each tone on the Atari 2600, marking the keys of the keyboard when I found a tone that matched an in-tune note. We then hired a professional jingle writer, sat him in front of the keyboard and told him to write a song, using only the marked keys. His first reaction was 'you're kidding me, right?' but he soon got into it and wrote the *Pressure Cooker* jingle. With no sour notes it ended up sounding great.

Was Activision a good place to work?

It was great in its time. The smartest thing that Activision did during that time period was to hire brilliant creative

* FIVE TO PLAY

Garry isn't afraid of diversity and turned his talented hand to all manner of different genres. Here are some of his finest moments

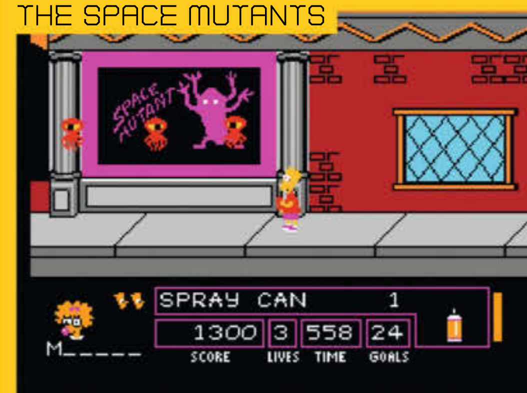
GARRY KITCHEN'S GAME MAKER





SO MANY PEOPLE want to make games, meaning that utilities like this provide many hours of entertainment of their own. Garry had created The Designer's Pencil first, but that was limited to drawing pictures and playing music. Game Maker's comprehensive manual makes the process easy to understand. Five central 'makers' allow the creation of scenes (backgrounds), sounds, music, sprites and the central code. Everything is chosen from simple menus and icons controlled by a joystick, from picking the parameters of a moving object to placing notes on the musical score. The programming language allows complex actions to be understood and quickly changed. The demos prove the versatility of Game Maker, including Dan Kitchen's faithful reproduction of *Pitfall* and John van Ryzin's *Chopper 1*. Activision also marketed two add-on disks, Sci-Fi and Sports, featuring additional sprites, sounds and scenes to spark the imagination.

THE SIMPSONS: BART SIMPSON VS THE SPACE MUTANTS



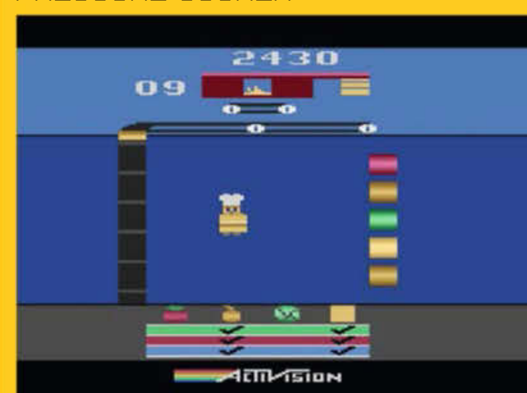
GARRY AND THE Absolute team designed the NES game during the TV show's first season, before Ocean released the successful home computer conversions. Bart had to explore five areas of Springfield, thwarting the Space Mutant invasion by collecting, destroying or painting over the objects the aliens needed. X-ray specs revealed humans to be freed from alien possession by jumping on their heads, granting coins to buy the help of family members against the end-of-level bosses. Nods to the TV series included cherry bombs, Sideshow Bob and Bart making a prank call to Moe's Bar. Along with the Konami arcade game, this is one of the best *Simpsons* games.

A BOY AND HIS BLOB



IT WAS DAVID Crane's name on the box and the title screen, but Garry helped out with this charming arcade adventure subtitled '*Trouble On Blobolonia*'. The unique control method sees the player feeding flavoured sweets to the alien blob that constantly follows him, transforming it into useful tools to help the player progress. These include a ladder, trampoline and umbrella – but the player has limited numbers of each flavour. The aim is to return to Blobolonia and free it from the evil emperor. The Wii version by remake specialists WayForward was testament to the original's clever ideas, adding new challenge levels (opened by collecting hidden treasure chests).

PRESSURE COOKER



BURGER TIME WAS not the only game to feature fast food preparation. In this Atari 2600 classic, the moving conveyor belts constantly feed burgers from the oven, which must be filled to match the orders at the bottom of the screen. The cook must catch the ingredients (lettuce, tomato, cheese and onion) flying from the four dispensers, add them to the burger and then top off the bun, before switching screens to place the order into the wrapping machine in the correct line. The pressure builds as orders become complicated and the conveyors speed up. 45,000 points were required to earn the Short-Order Squad patch.

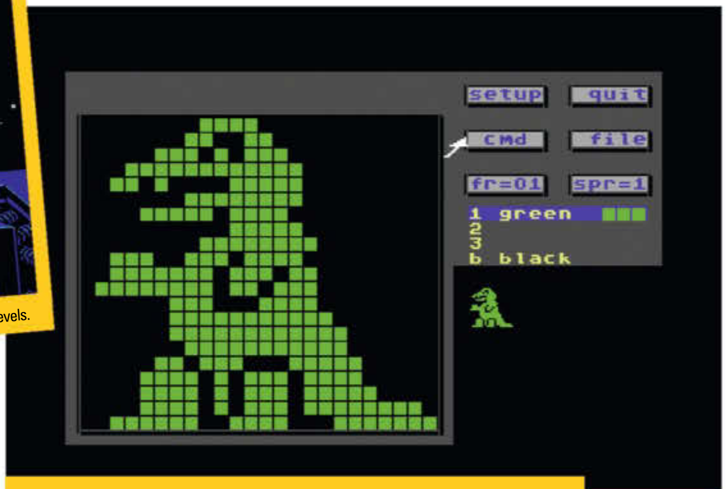
SUPER BATTLETANK



THE INVASION OF Kuwait by Iraqi forces in 1990 inspired several games, including the classic *Desert Strike*. Absolute jumped to 16-bit with the second *Battletank*, using a sprite-scaling engine to recreate tank battles in the Middle East and dedicated to the men and women who had fought in Operation Desert Storm. The M1 Abrams tank featured in the game was armed with a laser and cannon, as well as the smokescreen to help evade the enemy vehicles. Briefing screens gave the targets and the score after a mission. It was voted Best Simulation Game by *Game Informer* magazine in 1992, and also appeared on Game Boy and Game Gear.



» [NES] *Destination Earthstar* mixed 3D space combat with horizontal levels.



» [C64] A Godzilla-like monster is ready to wreak havoc, created in Game Maker's Sprite Maker.

> " I hope [Game Maker] inspired other people to pursue creative avenues for their careers "

people and leave them alone to create. That strategy only works with the right people, of course. But when it worked, it worked very, very well. No marketing department or corporate 'suits' and bean counters were going to come up with *Pitfall!*, *Chopper Command*, *Olympic Decathlon* or any of the other great games that Activision made during that time frame.

It amazes me today how that lesson has been completely lost. I know many game developers that work at large, well-established companies who describe a creative environment 180 degrees opposed to the Activision model. Coincidentally, these are the same companies that also fail to innovate, putting out the umpteenth first-person shooter or clone of yesterday's best-seller. Innovation happens in small environments where passionate people relentlessly pursue a vision, without having to justify the project's existence at monthly review meetings. Yet large companies (who you would think know better) insist on constraining the creative process with levels and levels and levels of opinions, lengthy design specifications, approvals, green light processes, concepts, ideas and tweaks from a committee of people who have no idea how to make a fun game, all in the pursuit of the 'next *Angry Birds*'. Well, *Angry Birds* did not come out of a large, constrained corporate environment and I can guarantee that the 'next one', whatever it ends up being, won't either.

This was a successful period for you. Did you get much feedback from players during this time?

We got a lot of fan mail during that time period, so I did get a lot of feedback from players. In fact, I still get an email (maybe once a month), from classic game lovers thanking me for my work in the early days and telling me how much they liked a certain game of mine. I'm always flattered, as it's very kind of them to take the time to write.

Was the videogame 'crash' a big factor in your change of direction, towards creativity software?

We weren't given a choice. Activision management said, 'No more games! Do something different, innovate!'

The Designer's Pencil and Garry Kitchen's Game Maker both use a graphical user interface. What inspired them?

I was most inspired by the Macintosh, which came out around the same time I was working on those products. Those products were designed to run on the Commodore 64, a much more powerful system than the Atari 2600. So, was it easy? No, it never is. We got a perverse pleasure out of using every ounce of power in the target platform, so it was never easy. In the end, after all the blood and sweat, I am probably most proud of Game Maker of all the products I've done.

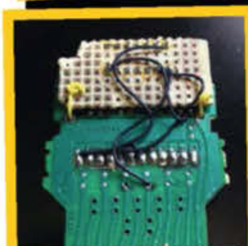
Have you seen other people's creations in Game Maker? What do you think of them?

Yes, I saw many creations people made. I was amazed at what they were able to accomplish. There was a relatively small but passionate fan base for the product. Periodically an accomplished game industry professional will come up to me at a conference and tell me that their exposure to Game Maker as a kid was the reason they chose videogames as a career. I hope that the product inspired other people to pursue creative avenues for their careers, even outside of the game industry. I wish that I had continued to develop the Game Maker franchise (rather than its destiny as a one-off game release), as I feel it was ahead of the curve in many ways.

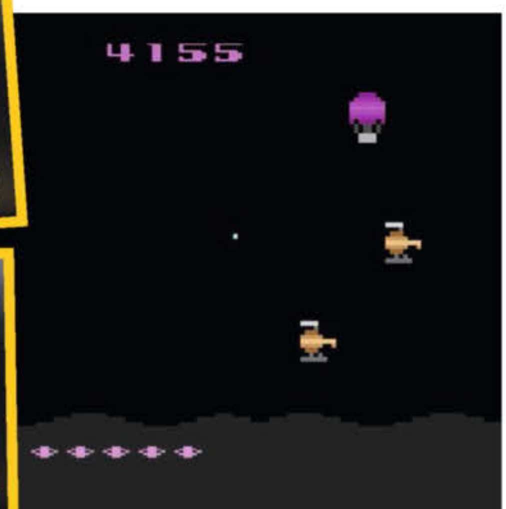
How did the forming of Absolute Entertainment come about?



» The prototype for *Space Jockey* on the Atari 2600.



» Here you can see the hand-wired prototype of *Space Jockey*.



NUMBER CRUNCHING

1 Lifetime Achievement Award presented to Garry at the Classic Gaming Expo 2003 in Las Vegas

U2 - Super Battletank appeared in video footage used by the Irish band during their Zoo TV tour. A modified version also appeared in the Robin Williams film Toys, to which Absolute would create the tie-in game

3 games in the Battletank series

5 different formats for The Designer's Pencil

F**117**A the Nighthawk stealth fighter appeared in Stealth ATF

5200 Keystone Kapers appeared in an updated version for the Atari 5200

4,346,892 the US patent number granted to LED game Bank Shot

$**100** million - revenue generated by Garry's Donkey Kong conversion on the Atari 2600

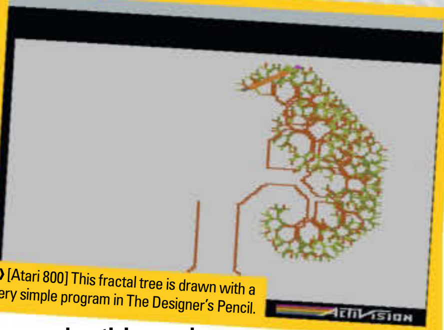
We formed Absolute when it became clear that Activision (under its leadership at the time) had run its course for us. It was a great run but it was over. It was clear that the company (then becoming Mediagenic) was going in a different direction than where we wanted to go as a group. We left, with Activision's blessing, and formed Absolute Entertainment.

Your brother Dan was part of the Absolute team…

Dan and I have worked together on and off in numerous companies throughout our careers. It's always been great fun. Dan is very strong creatively, with great gameplay instincts.

A Boy And His Blob is fondly remembered. Where did the idea come from?
The idea was all David (Crane). He was working for Absolute remotely from the West Coast. I spoke to him almost every day. One day he said to me, 'I have an idea I want to show you'. He got on a plane, came out to headquarters and booted up this demo. There was this little marshmallow-like character standing there on a black screen. He hit a button to toss something to the character who caught it in his mouth and morphed into a ladder. We were all instantly enthralled. It was a magical moment.

Did you realise _The Simpsons_ would be so big when you started working on _Bart Simpson Vs The Space Mutants_?
Yes, I immediately knew it would be huge. Greg Fischbach, the founder of Acclaim and ex-Activision executive, called me the day the first Simpsons episode aired and asked me if I wanted to do the project. I immediately said 'yes'. Greg had the magic touch in choosing licences and properties (*Simpsons*, *Ghostbusters*, *Mortal Kombat*, etc). I knew it was a winner right away and I thank Greg for having the confidence in me and my team to do the project.



» [Atari 800] This fractal tree is drawn with a very simple program in The Designer's Pencil.

Your next company, Skyworks, was a pioneer in terms of advertising in games. Do you think advertising and brand promotion is good for games?
When done properly, the convergence of advertising and games is highly effective. When overdone, or done gratuitously, it is annoying and ineffective.

How do you see the future of games right now?
Despite all the excitement and seemingly endless opportunities, it's a difficult time in videogames right now. I can't tell you the number of game developers I hear about who have left the mainstream industry to launch yet another mobile game developer/publisher. It's the 1849 Gold Rush all over again with all the stagecoaches heading straight to Cupertino (Apple's headquarters). While developing a game on iOS is a breath of fresh air (compared to the complexity of a current generation console title), the space has become so crowded that it's in danger of turning into a bloodbath for many talented developers. Don't get me wrong, I've had great success on the iOS platform, having worked on six titles that went to number one in the Apple AppStore. But I was early, when 20,000 apps in the store seemed like a lot.

Today, for every *Clash Of Clans* or *Angry Birds* there are hundreds of high quality games that never earn a dime. The most unfortunate aspect is the erosion of pricing, to the point where the American consumer now believes that it's their God-given right to get a professionally done, high quality videogame for $0.99, less than the cost of an order of fries at your favourite fast food establishment. And then they review the game, trashing it and saying it 'wasn't worth the money'. Ay, caramba!

Would you be tempted to go back to your old creations and make new versions?
Sure, it's always a temptation to revisit old creations. Maybe I'll go back and finish *Donkey Kong* 2600, adding the two missing levels!

Are you working on any new ideas?
I'm always playing around with ideas. I have a couple of things I'm percolating on right now, one of which I'm getting very excited about.

YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

Readers had plenty of questions for Garry about his lengthy career in the games industry. Be sure to visit www.retrogamer.net/forum for future interviews

Paranoid Marvin: How did you manage to program the game to have so much simultaneously going on on-screen in _Keystone Kapers_ on the VCS?
The trick with a game like *Keystone Kapers* was to work with the hardware, rather than against it. With four horizontal zones for the floors the design took advantage of the fact that you could reuse the Atari play objects many times, as long you were able to restrict each unique instance to a defined horizontal band. Many VCS games follow this model; for example, you see it in other Activision games like *Freeway*, *Grand Prix* and to some extent *Pitfall!*.

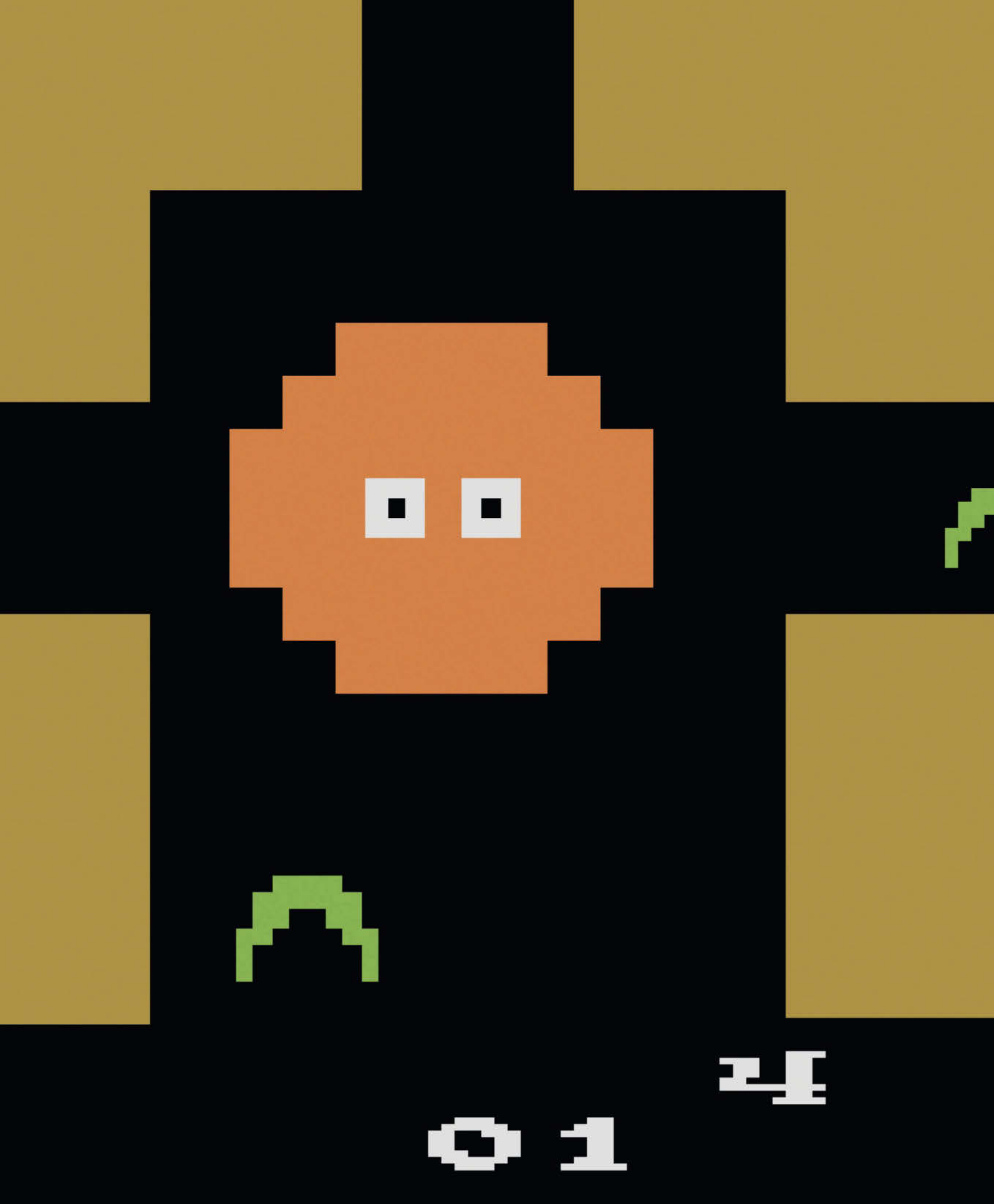


» [Atari 2600] The horizontal bands are evident in the shopping mall floors of *Keystone Kapers*.

DRS: Activision made a big point of crediting their programmers by name and rewarding them for big selling games… do you think if Atari had followed the same policy early on, people might never have left to form Activision?
No, I don't believe that would have made a difference. At the time David, Alan, Bob and Larry left Atari there was a general lack of respect for the people that made the games. David likes to tell the story that he was told by senior management that they (the four top game designers at Atari) were no more important than the guy who screwed together the plastic case of the cartridge on the assembly line was. The problems were much deeper than just name recognition.

Flatapex: What is your favourite of your own videogames to play in retrospect?
Very hard to say, generally my favourite game is the one I'm currently working on and my least favourite game is the one I just finished (because I'm sick of seeing it). I have to go back and look at them again, as I haven't played many of them in 20+ years. The last one I played was *Keystone Kapers*. I had fun but I couldn't get to the score necessary to win an Activision patch.

Frank Gasking: What happened to _StarFighter_, the 3D C64 game Absolute was working on?
Boy, I haven't thought about that game since probably 1986. I was very impressed by Doug Neubauer's *Star Raiders* on the Atari 400/800, it blew me away. I had always wanted to build a next-gen space combat game. I worked on *StarFighter* for quite a while on the C64, building a quasi-3D world engine designed for a combat game. I had some great work done on the C64 version when the Nintendo NES exploded into the marketplace Christmas of 1985. By 1986 it was clear to us at that the NES was a huge opportunity. Since the NES had the same microprocessor as the C64, I ported my 3D-world engine code over the NES to get a head start on NES games. Some of that code ended up in NES *Destination Earthstar*, a space combat game that was published by Acclaim. The engine was also used in Absolute Entertainment's NES *Battletank*, followed by the Super NES *Super Battletank*. I never did get back to finishing *StarFighter*, which is sad because it would have been a fun game. That's another one to add to my list of things to do.


01
4

Haunted House

SURVIVAL HORROR BEFORE IT HAD A NAME

» RETROREVIVAL



» Atari 2600
» Atari Inc
» 1982

This innovative release from Atari Inc is arguably one of the first examples of survival horror and it's a cracker to boot, creating an oppressive creepy atmosphere that no amount of flickering visuals could remove.

You're essentially exploring the house of the late Zachary Graves that consists of four floors and a basement, with different colours to indicate which floor you're currently exploring. And explore you must, as there are three missing pieces of an urn that need to be recovered. Yes it's sounds straightforward, until you understand the mechanic that the game uses.

Rooms are pitch black and the only way you can retrieve the precious urn and escape the house is by lighting a match. Any nearby objects are instantly illuminated for a short time, allowing you to grab them and get out in one piece. In addition to the valuable urn, you'll find additional items that range from keys to sceptres, for opening doors and warding off the spirit of Zachary Graves respectively. It's a delightful concept and works exceptionally well, especially when you consider that any creature entering the room immediately blows your candle out, adding further to your desperate search. You'll want to avoid these monsters, as getting hit by them stuns you. Get hit too many times and your time in the haunted house is over.

Haunted House is a wonderful game that was ahead of its time upon release. Atari released a sequel in 2010, and while it features improved visuals and additional search mechanics, it failed to capture the creepiness of the original.

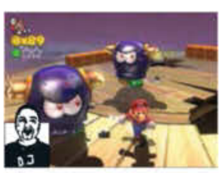
RETRORATED



>> It's a packed issue this month. Nintendo's 20-years-in-the-making sequel to A Link To The Past is finally with us and we also get to play Super Mario 3D World. There's also some hardcore typing action with The Typing Of The Dead: Overkill and gadget shenanigans with Batman



✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH

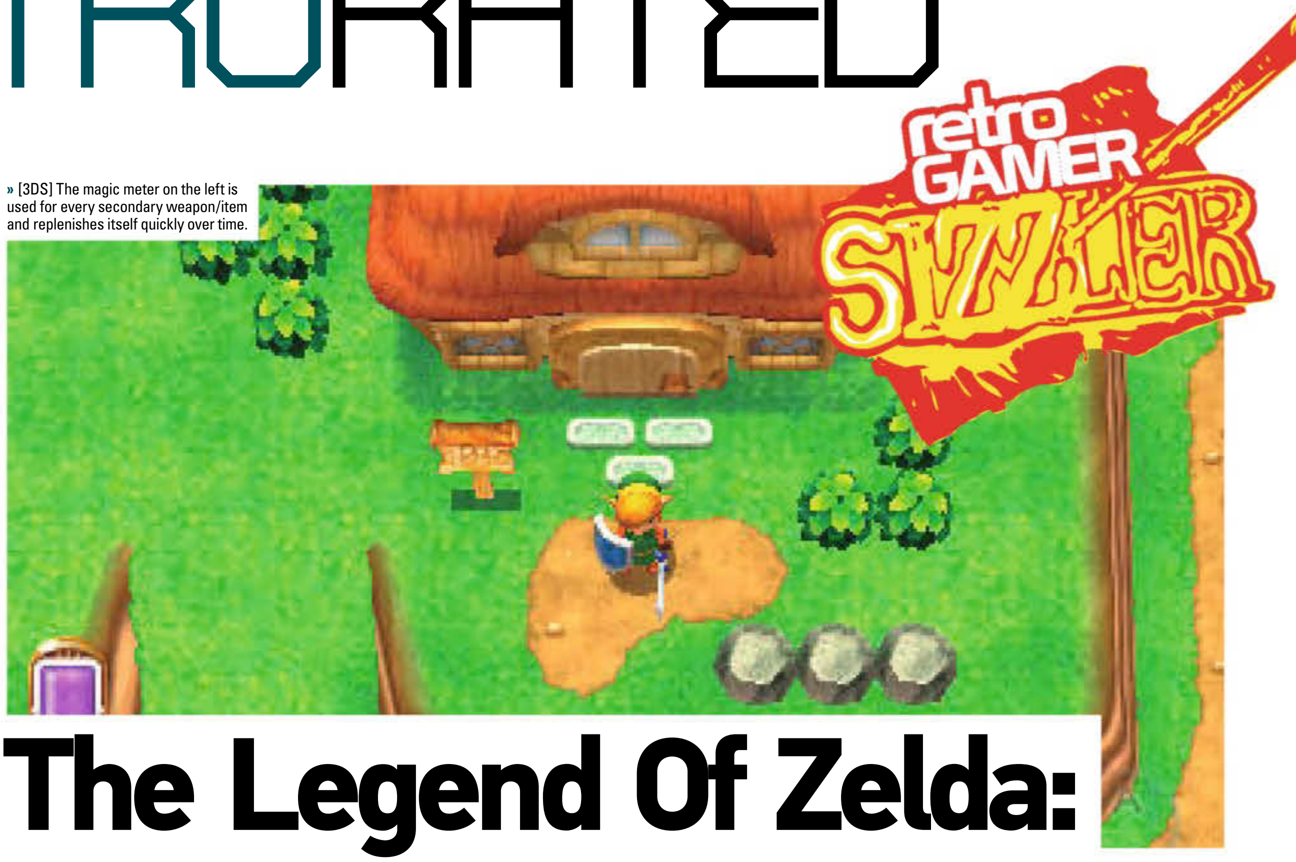


DARRAN
Super Mario 3D World
A marvelous platformer by Nintendo that's packed with neat little gameplay touches and superb level design.



DAVID
The Typing Of The Dead: Overkill
Excellent adaptation of *The House Of The Dead: Overkill* that's fantastic fun to play.

» [3DS] The magic meter on the left is used for every secondary weapon/item and replenishes itself quickly over time.



The Legend Of Zelda: A Link Between Worlds

THE BRIGHTEST FLAME CASTS THE DARKEST SHADOW

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** 3DS
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £39.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **PLAYERS:** 1

BRIEF HISTORY

» *A Link Between Worlds* takes place in the same universe as *A Link To The Past*, though it has been several generations since the events of *ALTTP*. While Hyrule is still ruled by Princess Zelda, the Dark World/Lorule is ruled by her darker counterpart Hilda. Rumours that we'll see Sabrina the teenage witch in a sequel are unconfirmed.

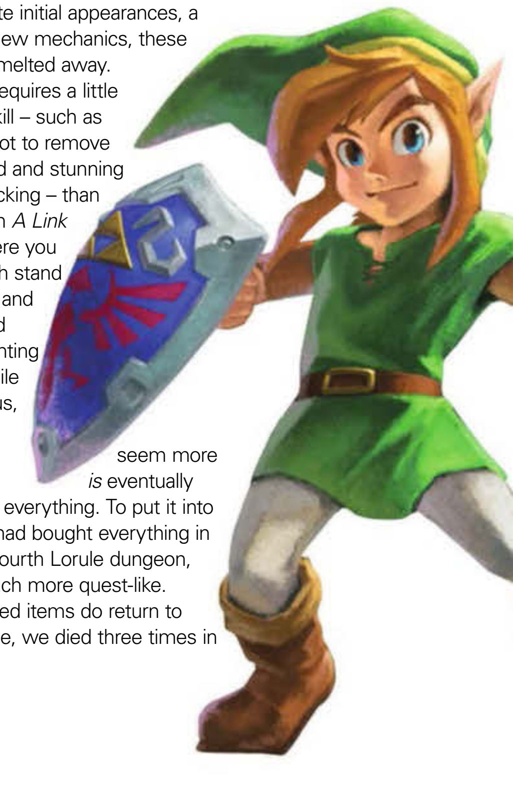
***The Legend Of Zelda: A Link Between Worlds* is very much a game of two sides: Hyrule and Lorule, the 3D world and the 2D world, and those who are willing to engage with a new traditional *Zelda* and those who aren't. In all honesty, when we first started playing, we were leaning a little bit towards the latter group. It's easy to get a bit grumpy about things not quite being the same as *A Link To The Past*, seeing as it's set in the same world, as many elements are just different enough to be noticeable and feel a bit off. When we got swallowed up by a Like Like, the bouncing animation was different. Yes, it's that level of petty, but we played *A Link To The Past* a *lot*.**

But it wasn't just minor things; the larger changes also at first seemed out of place. So we're supposed to rent things now instead of find/trade/win them along the way? And all the items are available almost right from the start? What kind of hand-holding pandering is this? I can't attack enemies properly, what's with all this circling? It's almost inevitable that it's going to get compared unfavourably to *A Link To The Past* on account of these differences, but it really shouldn't. *A Link Between Worlds* is just that: it's not worse, it's just different. As soon as we got over the fact that this is, despite initial appearances, a new *Zelda* with new mechanics, these annoyances just melted away.

Combat now requires a little more technical skill – such as using the hookshot to remove an enemy's shield and stunning them before attacking – than it ever really did in *A Link To The Past*, where you could pretty much stand at the right angle and swipe your sword endlessly. The renting items aspect, while initially contentious, is a great way to make the world seem more open, and there *is* eventually the option to buy everything. To put it into perspective, we had bought everything in the shop by the fourth Lorule dungeon, making it feel much more quest-like. Though your rented items do return to the shop if you die, we died three times in



» [3DS] There were some tools we didn't much use (sand wand, yawn), and some – like this hammer – that we used a *lot*.



our entire playthrough, and only once in a dungeon. It's the sort of thing you do once and then you really don't do it again, vowing to save more often.

The overworld of *A Link Between Worlds* is heart-warmingly familiar, while the dungeons are all refreshingly new. It's clear that it's been handled with real love; it would have been easy to slap in a few new textures and bosses and give us more of what we've already seen, but the dungeons have a brilliant range of puzzles, often working on multiple levels, with Link gaining the ability to become a painting and travel on a 2D plane. It adds a surprising level of depth to a dungeon, with 'Oh! I can travel across that wall!' moments striking frequently.

The only thing that really disappointed was the difficulty of the bosses. With renting equipment, Nintendo has realised it's unfair to expect a difficult boss to suddenly come out of nowhere for you to try and fail against a number of times before you figure out what to do. So bosses are a little easy, when we would have preferred that trial and error element that *Zelda* often has of running through equipment. Bombs? No… Arrows? No… Aha! Lantern!

A Link Between Worlds will only ever punish you for not taking it seriously; running into a dungeon without a good range of equipment and a couple of bottled fairies, for example, or thinking you can just charge in without having saved in an hour. The world is still pretty linear up until the discovery of Lorule, and then it becomes a lot more open. We wish we'd stayed a little closer to home for our first dungeon, but again, it's more like a real adventure to have the option of starting anywhere. Besides, it always plays fair; there are either signifiers outside the dungeon that show you what you need inside, or you won't be able to get in at all without a particular tool. It's classic *Zelda* in that respect, dungeons are still linked with a primary item, only now it isn't just random items you handily acquired just before you happened to come across the appropriate dungeon, it's ones you planned out first like a proper adventurer.

Another issue with two sides is the look of it. Again, we were wary at first, dismissing it unfairly as shiny and soulless in comparison to *A Link To The Past*, but like *The Wind Waker*, it's an art style that grows on you. It allows for a lot more detail, homes feeling personal to the individual characters and adding to the immersion that's so vital in returning to a place we know this well, while the 3D not only works but has been used brilliantly to explore layers within dungeons.

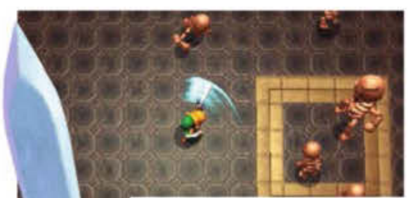
Aside from the main quest, there are loads of mini-games to play, upgrades to your equipment to find and lots of little creatures to discover, hidden throughout the world in inventive places. Also, getting all those heart containers will take you a good long while, and there's a battle arena in Lorule for when you've racked up Rupees. So first impressions aren't always accurate; we're happy to say we were wrong about this one. *A Link Between Worlds* is a brilliant *Zelda* game, and worthy of its heritage.

Rebecca Richards

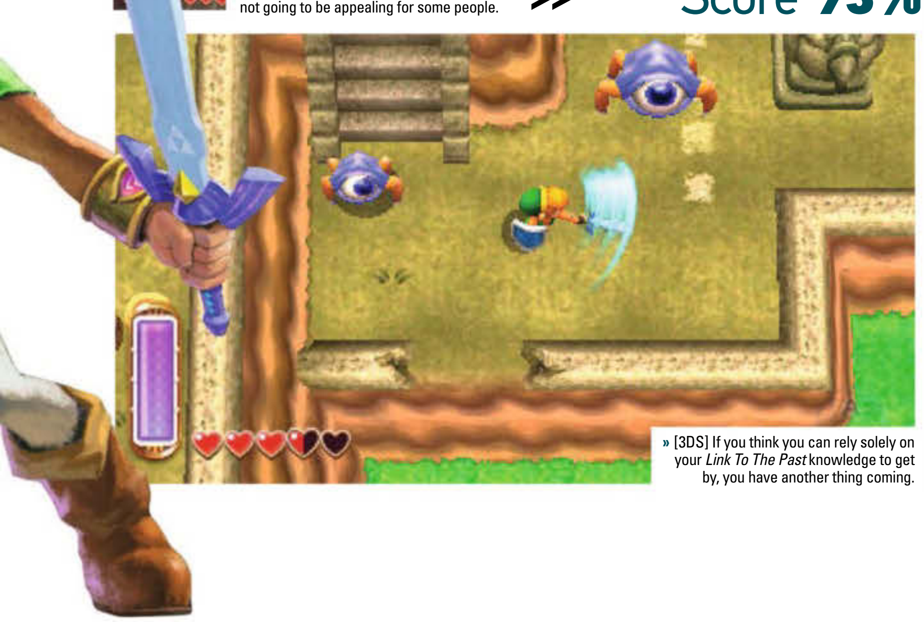
In a nutshell

Bosses are the only thing that lets down *A Link Between Worlds*, but even then, it's clearly the lesser of two evils. The 3D graphics work well, the game has a good length, the puzzles and dungeons are great; if you can get past the fact it isn't an HD *A Link To The Past*, it's a very worthwhile return to Hyrule.

>> Score 93%



» [3DS] The shiny look of Zelda on the DS is not going to be appealing for some people.



» [3DS] If you think you can rely solely on your *Link To The Past* knowledge to get by, you have another thing coming.



» [3DS] And here we have Link as a painting, useful for travelling on a 2D plane.

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST [SNES]



▼ SOMETHING NEW
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER HD [WII U]



Similar games to play

Alundra (PlayStation)



A brilliant adventure game with a very similar set-up to the *Zelda* franchise, both visually and story-wise: a young protagonist wakes up in a strange place and must battle powerful enemies before becoming strong enough to fight the ultimate evil.

Secret Of Mana (SNES)



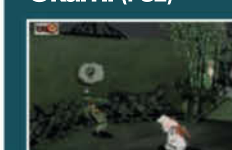
With a visual style very much like to *A Link To The Past*, *Secret Of Mana* was another epic adventure, set in a beautiful and imaginative 16-bit world. If anything, *Secret Of Mana*'s world was even more creative than that of *A Link Between Worlds*.

Terraria (PC)



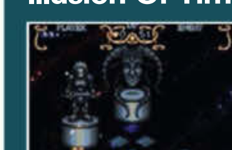
With less of the world showing itself to you and more of you building the world, *Terraria* would nonetheless not exist as it does without *Zelda*'s influence. It's like a barebones *Zelda*, with a world to explore, characters to speak to and quests to go on.

Okami (PS2)



Despite being the story of a sun goddess in the body of a white wolf out to save the world from pesky evil forces, *Okami* is fairly reminiscent of *Twilight Princess* in the ways that you explore the game world and interact with it.

Illusion Of Time (SNES)



Another classic SNES RPG adventure. *Illusion Of Time*, like the *Zelda* series, blurs the RPG/action/adventure lines to great effect, producing one of the most engaging and charming games about saving the world from a big bad evil.





» [Wii U] There are some highly entertaining bosses and Bowser himself shows up on several important occasions.

GO DEEPER

The facts behind Super Mario 3D World

>> The flimsy plot involves Mario and his friends attempting to rescue fairies known as Sprixies from Bowser.

>> Neat new additions to *Super Mario's* core gameplay include stamps that can be collected and the ability to watch the ghosts of other players.

>> *Super Mario World 3D* supports several controllers, but it's built around the GamePad.

Super Mario 3D World

MARIO'S NEW PLATFORMER IS PRETTY MUCH PURRFECT

INFORMATION

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** NINTENDO WII U
» **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** NA
» **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £49.99
» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
» **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO EAD TOKYO
» **PLAYERS:** 1-4

BRIEF HISTORY

» The *Super Mario Bros* series first appeared on the NES in 1985 and was created by Shigeru Miyamoto. Since then it has gone on to become the most successful platform franchise around, spanning numerous Nintendo systems and cementing Mario as one of gaming's most recognisable characters.

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
SUPER MARIO 64 (N64)



▼ SOMETHING NEW
SUPER MARIO 3D LAND (3DS)





Is *Super Mario 3D World* really perfect? Not quite, but it does mean we can use a delightful pun in our stand first. It is amazing just how good Mario's latest 3D platformer is though, especially after a selection of solid, but hardly inspiring side-on adventures for the moustachioed plumber.

Super Mario 3D World has the same sort of gleeful gameplay and imaginative level design that made the *Super Mario Galaxy* games such a joy to play, and while it's not quite up to those impossibly high standards, it's a very close thing indeed.

The new cat suit isn't quite the gimmick that's been suggested, making Mario and his mates extremely powerful and delivering a new wall climbing ability that ensures you'll explore every last possible inch of each level in search of the precious stars that Mario covets. Other cool additions include the ability to multiply Mario by eating cherries, a greatly improved dash that really comes into its own on certain stages and the ability to dress up as Goombas, thus avoiding most nearby enemies. There are plenty of other neat little touches to discover, many of which revolve around the Wii U's GamePad.

It's the level design and variety where *Super Mario 3D World* really excels though. One minute you're hurtling down a slide on the back of an aquatic dinosaur, the next you're navigating a *Minecraft*-like structure as Miner Toad. Nintendo keeps on throwing curveballs at you, and our only real regret is that some of the really clever stages are only used one or two times. It's a small point though, and just serves to make them that much more memorable. Bosses are also great fun, and while there's a Capcom-like trend of reusing many of them, they never outstay their welcome.

As with the likes of *Super Mario 3D Land*, you can zip through stages relatively quickly, but you'll need to find a large amount of stars if you want to make proper progress into this surprisingly lengthy platformer. The four-player option still feels like it's shoe-horned in, but that's the only gripe we can find in this otherwise excellent game.



» [Wii U] Some of the gameplay mechanics are excellent. This particular level is fantastic fun to explore.



» [Wii U] We always found the *New Super Mario Bros* games to be rather messy in multiplayer and this is no different.

In a nutshell

Loads to discover, plenty of clever gameplay mechanics and amazing level design make this an essential platformer that's worth owning a Wii U for.

>> **Score 96%**



X360

Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow – Mirror Of Fate HD

» FEATURED SYSTEM: XBOX 360 **» ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PS3 **» RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» PRICE: £11.99 **» PUBLISHER:** KONAMI **» DEVELOPER:** MERCURYSTEAM **» PLAYERS:** 1

» [Xbox 360] (Above) While there are plenty of boss fights, they lack the impact of past mayors from the series.
» [Xbox 360] (Right) The combat feels a little too confined on the big screen for some reason.
» [Xbox 360] (Bottom) The notable differences between the three main characters is one of *Mirror*'s biggest strengths.





>> *Mirror Of Fate* proved to be a surprisingly enjoyable yarn on 3DS, nicely dovetailing with *Lords Of Shadow* and letting you play as three key characters from the popular series across three acts. It's now been converted to PS3 and Xbox 360, and while it remains a fundamentally enjoyable adventure, it has lost a little something in its translation to the bigger consoles.

Mirror Of Fate on 3DS genuinely looked lovely, with fantastic 3D effects decent monster design and some lovely atmospheric visuals. Obviously the 3D elements have no longer been retained, but the graphics also seem to suffer, as if they lack the splendour to convincingly fill your television screen. There's no denying that it still looks suitably moody at times, but like *Resident Evil Revelations* before it, its small screen origins are obvious and it all looks a little bare.

Fortunately the game itself is a solid as ever, allowing you to play as three different characters over the course of your adventure, namely Simon Belmont, Trevor Belmont and fan favourite Alucard. All three characters not only differ from each other in terms of skills, but also navigate Dracula's castle in their own ways. For example, Alucard's act features more puzzles, while Trevor favours combat.

Combat, however, is where things are let down a little, for the system used in *Lords Of Shadow* doesn't translate quite as well when scaled down to 2.5D. Even though there are only a few enemies onscreen at any one time, you always feel confined as if there's not enough room to unleash your powerful attacks.

Having said that, there's enough clever level design and satisfying boss encounters to ensure that you scour every single room of Dracula's home. *Mirror Of Fate* has certainly lost something in its translation to a bigger screen, but it remains a highly enjoyable *Castlevania* adventure.

>> Score **70%**

The Typing Of The Dead: Overkill

PC

» FEATURED SYSTEM: PC **» ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** NA **» RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» PRICE: £14.99 **» PUBLISHER:** SEGA **» DEVELOPER:** MODERN DREAM **» PLAYERS:** 1

>> *The House Of* *The Dead: Overkill* was an underrated Wii game that blended the profanity and gore of the grindhouse genre with Sega's popular zombie series. This latest version is the third iteration of the game after its PS3 and iOS outings. We'd also argue that it's the best.

For those unaware, *Typing Of The Dead: Overkill* is essentially the PS3 version of the game, which is also included. The difference is that instead of shooting zombies with a pad (or mouse, which is surprisingly effective) you take them out by typing words. It's a great concept that worked well with the 1999 original (which was based on *The House Of The Dead 2*) and is still great fun to play now.

Initially you'll be typing in simple five to seven letter words, but as the game progresses you'll start to furiously type out long sentences, ranging from 'Is It Too Late To Shake Hands', to 'Do A Barrel Roll'. That last sentence is also indicative of the many game references that Modern Dream has thrown into the mix, giving you things to look out for as you shoot down the zombie scum with a stream of rapid typing.

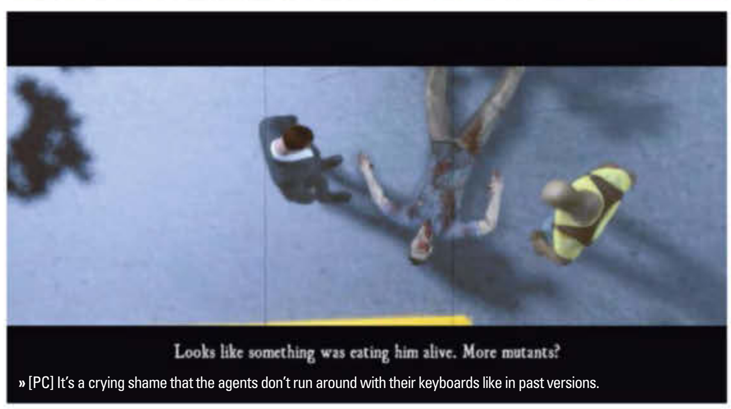
Boss battles are predictably tougher that standard enemies, and if you make too many mistakes on a word you'll be forced to re-type it from the beginning. The words themselves can be prioritised by typing in the first letter and continuing with it. This is important because certain zombies move faster than others (indicated by their phrases showing up in red) so you'll occasionally need to use Backspace to erase a half-written word and choose a more appropriate target. You'll also get multipliers for continually typing words without making mistakes.

It's all rounded off by a selection of fun mini-games, the aforementioned full version of PS3 *Overkill* and hilarious dialogue that features more F bombs than a Tarantino movie. A massively entertaining blaster.

>> Score **88%**

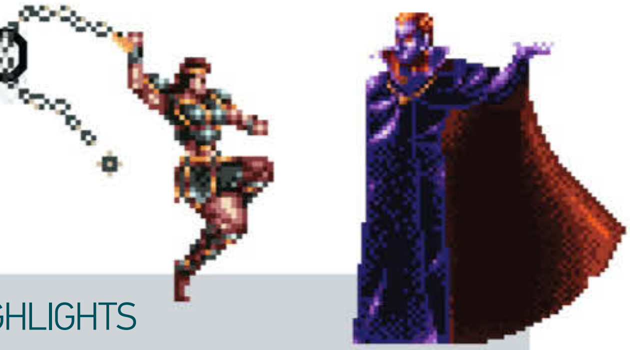


» [PC] Rescuing hostages is a lot trickier than before and will really test your typing skills.



» [PC] It's a crying shame that the agents don't run around with their keyboards like in past versions.

RETROROUND-UP



>> Every month we look at all the classics and latest releases that are available to buy or download

DOWNLOAD OF THE MONTH

Apple Dash HD

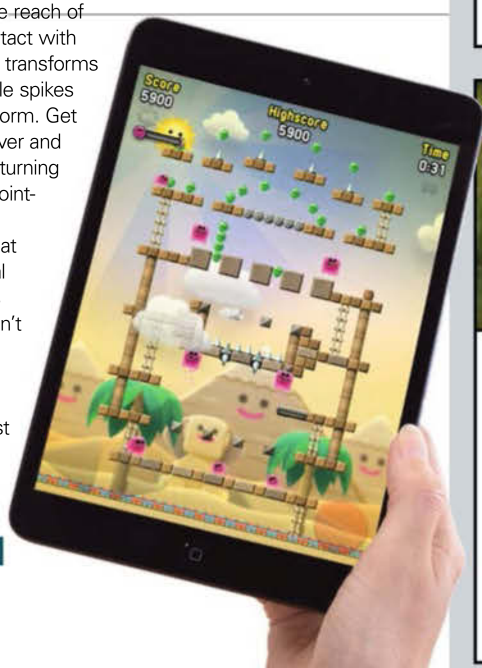
***Apple Dash* was originally planned for Sega's Mega Drive but became lost in the mists of time. Coder Jim Bagley has now revived the project for iOS and it's only really let down by its choice of format.**

First the good news though: *Apple Dash HD* is fantastic fun. It effortlessly captures the spirit of old-school platformers like *Chuckie Egg*, *Rainbow Islands* and *Bubble Bobble*, but has plenty of its own cool ideas to make it stand out in Apple's competitive market.

There are four worlds, each consisting of 25 levels – good value for your £1.99 entry fee. Each level has three stars to collect, with stars being awarded for collecting a set amount of fruit, completing the stage in a specific time and grabbing the bonus letters that fall down at the end of each completed level. Main hero Dash is a charming character with an unhealthy fixation for cute hats (which grant various bonuses), while the delightful soundtrack appears to have been lifted from some forgotten classic arcade game.

Dash only has a set amount of time to race through each stage, and while it seems initially generous you soon find yourself up against it as the game progresses. You'll also need to master the 'drop jump', which extends the reach of Dash's jump. Coming into contact with the various blob-like monsters transforms you and slows you down, while spikes cause you to drop back a platform. Get an invulnerability flower however and you can plough through both, turning the monsters back into cute point-scoring bees.

It's a delightful little game that is only let down by some brutal difficulty spikes (touch controls and precise platforming just don't go together) on certain stages. Luckily, you can skip these by watching trailers for other games, ensuring even the most incompetent gamer will get to experience everything this delightful game has to offer.



INFORMATION

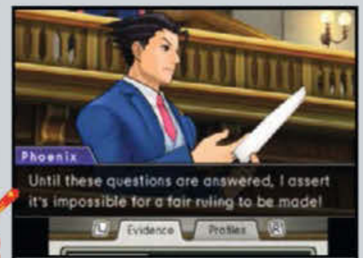
» **System:** iOS
» **Buy it for:** £1.99
» **Buy it from:** AppStore
» **Score:** 85%

>> OTHER HIGHLIGHTS



Super Castlevania IV

» **System:** SNES
» **Buy it for:** £5.49
» **Buy it from:** Virtual Console (Wii U)
» **Score:** 94%
» 22 years on and *Super Castlevania IV* remains one of the best games in the franchise. It starts off slowly with garish looking visuals and a few dull stages, but it soon builds into a truly epic adventure complete with astonishing Mode 7 effects, imaginative boss fights and broody, atmospheric locations that just beg to be explored. Topped off with an incredible soundtrack, it's an essential arcade adventure that simply improves with age.



Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney – Dual Destinies

» **System:** 3DS
» **Buy it for:** £19.99
» **Buy it from:** 3DS eShop
» **Score:** 72%
» Phoenix Wright might not feature as much as he did in past adventures, but this remains a solid addition to the franchise. The art design benefits from the use of 3D, while new gameplay mechanics like the ability to spot when speeches don't match a character's mood add to the core mechanics. It's all rounded off by entertaining characters and enjoyable twists and turns.



ShadowMan

» **System:** PC
» **Buy it for:** £3.29 ($5.99 GOG)
» **Buy it from:** Steam, GOG
» **Score:** 70%
» *ShadowMan* has you tracking serial killers across two worlds. It's a great concept for a game and while it's a little rough around the edges now, it remains an amazing tense adventure – particularly when you visit London's underground on the hunt for the notorious Jack The Ripper. The camera remains a constant pain, but the fun weapons and well-designed locations will keep you playing until the final epic battle.



Dots Adventures HD

» **System:** iOS
» **Buy it for:** Free (in-app purchases)
» **Buy it from:** AppStore
» **Score:** 66%
» *Dots Adventures* is a decent old-school platformer in the vein of *Jet Set Willy* and other collectathons. Simply make your way through the huge environments avoiding monsters, collecting keys to open new areas and grabbing as much food along the way as you can. One world is free, while others are available for 69p. It starts off well, but later worlds require a lot of backtracking for keys that sucks some of the fun out.



Batman: Arkham Origins Blackgate

» **System:** PS Vita » **Buy it for:** £39.99 » **Buy it from:** Online/Retail » **Score:** 73%

Batman's latest adventure is a highly entertaining 2.5D Metroidvania that looks absolutely superb on the Vita's OLED screen.

Blackgate Prison is split into three sections with each controlled by a major boss: The Penguin, Black Mask and The Joker. While it's not always clear how to defeat them, each encounter is highly imaginative in its design and offers a solid challenge.

Batman slowly builds his armoury up, allowing him to access otherwise unreachable areas of the prison as time progresses. Side-missions are also available and require extensive use of Detective Mode.

Blackgate is let down by its confusing map, the need to detect most items of interest first before you can interact with them and some fiddly backtracking. It's an otherwise solid Metroidvania and an interesting change of direction for the Caped Crusader.

HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews



Paul Koller recently gave a 30-minute presentation at GDC Europe about his work converting Canabalt and Super Crate Box to the C64, during which he covered some of the challenges involved in shifting these games to a 30-year-old computer and discussed some of the design decisions taken. It's a bit technical, but worth watching even if you're not interested in the C64. kikstart.eu/koller-video

ABBUC SOFTWARE COMPETITION 2013

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN LOTS OF ATARI 8-BIT CODERS GET TOGETHER!

The ABBUC software competition is one of the highlights of the homebrew calendar and has been responsible for some excellent Atari 8-bit releases over the years, including *Ridiculous Reality* from 2012 and the amazing *Yoomp!* in 2007. This year there were 17 game entries in total.

To start with there's *Rolltris*, which looks like a *Tetris* clone but isn't; the player doesn't directly manipulate pieces as they fall, instead shuffling the rows of settled blocks at the bottom of the well to make space. Another more cerebral title is *Assembloids*, converted from the C64 where random quarters of a robotic face appear in the central window and must be quickly pushed into one of four work spaces to build complete faces. And continuing the puzzle theme is the reasonable but somewhat rushed *Xirius Defect*, where players use 'emitting elements' to fill spaces on the game board.

For players who like their games a bit more action-oriented, *Dev War* is a primitive-looking shooting game which pits one computer-controlled enemy against the player, who also has to deal with inertia and keeping one eye on their energy level at the same time. Similarly limited visually is *Speedway One*, a conversion of a *Magnavox Odyssey 2* game where racers must drive as far as possible within a time limit. There are lots of menu options for changing the length of the timer, altering the background colour or even swapping out the regular cars for the Millennium Falcon and some Tie Fighters.

Krzysztof 'xxl' Dudek's *Deathchase XE* is, as the name suggests, a conversion of the classic *Deathchase* from the Spectrum, which retains the high-speed 3D action of the original but enhances it with a tilting effect when the bike is turning. *The Hunt* is an engrossing strategic turn-based game where a young Predator takes part in its first hunt. Shoot-'em-up fans should enjoy the horizontally scrolling *X-8* which throws large numbers of enemies around and there's *Heli In The Caves* from the people behind previous ABBUC entry *Mighty Jill Off*, which does exactly what it says on the tin – hands the player control of a helicopter within a system of flick-screen and scrolling caves.

Finally, we have a cluster of six small BASIC games. These are probably the weakest entries this year but still amusing in short bursts – *Moonlander* in particular – and *Slovenian Quiz* which is a multiple choice challenge where the Slovenian version of an English word has to be selected from four options. Those BASIC ten-liners aside, all of the entries are enjoyable to play and well presented too; they're all worth trying, but *X-8* and *Deathchase XE* are highlights, *The Hunt* will suit fans of strategic action and for hair-pulling challenges it's hard to go wrong with either *Assembloids* or *Rolltris*.

91%

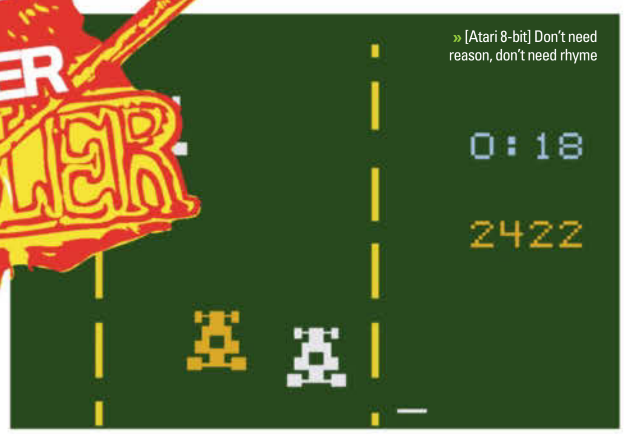


» [Atari 8-bit] Where are BA, Hannibal and Murdoch?



FORMAT: ATARI 8-BIT
DEVELOPER: VARIOUS
LINK: KIKSTART.EU/ABBUC-2013
RELEASE: 2013
PRICE: FREE (EARLY RELEASE TO ABBUC SUBSCRIBERS)
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

retro GAMER SIZZLER



» [Atari 8-bit] Don't need reason, don't need rhyme



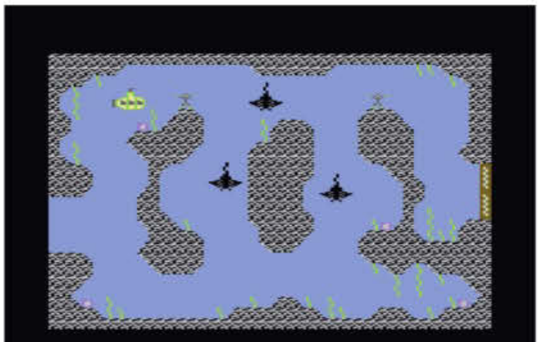
» [Atari 8-bit] X-ray X-ray delta niner niner zero.



» [Atari 8-bit] Familiar and yet different.

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk



» [C64] Because you enthral me so.

SUBMARINE RESCUE

» **FORMAT:** C64 » **DEVELOPER:** MAREK SOWA
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/SUB-RESCUE-C64 » **PRICE:** FREE

Dive beneath the waves and into a series of underwater caverns in your trusty submarine to pick up all of the stranded divers. Rescuing all of the divers within one grotto will open the doorway through to the next, and if you manage to actually complete all eight stages there's a heartfelt message from the divers' families.

We said "if you manage" for a reason however. Eight stages might not sound like much of a challenge, but the difficulty curve is close to being a vertical line courtesy of some pixel-perfect collision detection which makes getting past the hostile sea life without damaging the sub's hull on them or the rock face an extremely challenging task.

It isn't impossible to complete the mission with perseverance and some skill with a joystick, but being this hard will scare many players away. *Submarine Rescue* is developer Marek Sowa's first C64 game, so hopefully his second will be easier to get into.

58%



» [C64] And the band begins to play.

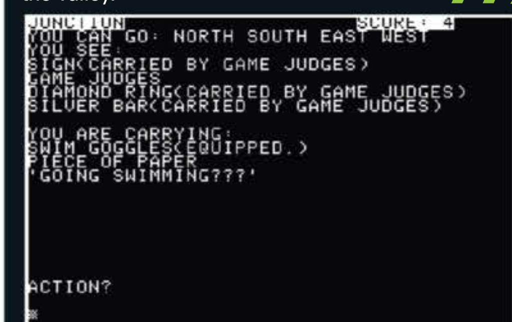
VALLEY OF TREASURES

» **FORMAT:** APPLE II » **DEVELOPER:** CHARLES GRAY
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/VALLEY-TREASURES-A2 » **PRICE:** FREE

The Game Judges need to collect five treasures scattered around their valley. Rather than do any actual hard work themselves, they've drafted a poor unsuspecting soul in to run around for them, solving puzzles and locating the required artefacts before returning them to where the Judges are waiting. The game looks like a regular text adventure but there's one fairly major difference; rather than typing instructions they're entered by cycling through the various words understood by the game and pressing enter to select the desired one.

This does take a little getting used to initially of course, but prevents most of the scrabbling around for an appropriate word that usually happens when text adventuring. And it doesn't become a simple task to complete it either, the simplified entry system doesn't hand anything to the player on a platter and most of the required treasures are concealed within some maze-like areas so treasure seekers should consider making a map of the valley.

77%



» [Apple II] Yes, very observant.

CADAVERION

» **FORMAT:** SPECTRUM » **DEVELOPER:** THE MOJON TWINS
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/CADAV-SPEC » **PRICE:** FREE

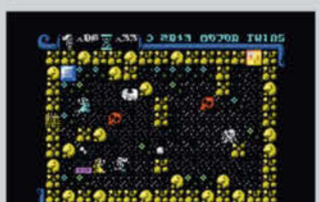
Cheril has been lured to a dodgy-looking mansion with the promise of a date with a local wizard by her nemesis, the evil witch Soraya. Since the entire building is rigged with explosives, our heroine's only option is to make a rapid dash to safety. But if she wants to unlock the exit of the current room, there are statues that need to be moved until they're covering all of the purple bases and, because Cheril can only push them and not pull them, a lot of care will need to be taken to avoid getting into any impossible situations.

Despite the arcade stylings, *Cadaverion* is actually a *Sokoban*-style puzzler where objects need to be pushed to specific points within a stage to complete it, but with the addition of patrolling creatures and a healthy dose of Mojon Twins presentation. The puzzles are far less harsh than most *Sokoban* clones too, so the addition of a timer adds an air of urgency without making things impossible.

82%



» [Spectrum] Don't blink.



» [Spectrum] An interesting take on *Sokoban*.

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [Amstrad CPC] Stop, you're in a shakedown zone.

» Round one – fight!

It isn't often that we can claim to be playing a preview of *Street Fighter II*, but that's possible right now because there's a new conversion in progress for the Amstrad CPC. Currently there are just placeholder graphics – although they're already more impressive than some of the 8-bit conversions – and it needs two human players since there's no AI code yet, but it looks promising. kikstart.eu/sf2-cpc-video.



» [MSX] A previous MSXdev entry.

» The temple of consumption

The ABBUC software competition has recently closed its doors with 14 entries, of which 12 are games. At the time of writing the games aren't available as the winners haven't been selected, but kikstart.eu/abbuc-2013 heads to the ABBUC page and we'll hopefully be able to cover most of the entries soon. Previous years have been great so we're looking forward to playing them.



» [C64] The fun will never end.

» Adventure time

Infocom's text adventures were held in very high regard by gamers during the Eighties despite suffering on 8-bits from heavy disk access. Zeugma is a new interpreter that utilises expansion hardware in order to speed up the process of playing these games and many other indie adventures developed with the Inform language. The first version is for the C64 with a RAM expansion: kikstart.eu/zeugma-c64.

HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from
the homebrew community

>> WHAT IF YOU ABANDONED ME… WITH A MACE

MACE is an attractive-looking vertically scrolling shoot-'em-up available on the Xbox Live Indie service. We've already had a test flight and it seems quite playable – especially when the weapons have been powered up a bit – but did feel that the levels themselves are remarkably long and there's a lot of repetition in the enemy attack patterns. Some players might find that off-putting, but anybody just wanting some mindless blasting can try the demo for size by visiting kikstart.eu/mace-xblig.



>> ROLLING, ROLLING, ROLLING

Described as "*Marble Madness* meets *Mario Bros*", *Super Pixel Ball* plonks a slippery marble into a platform-filled map and challenges the player to get out. The game isn't finished so runs out of levels quickly, but that shouldn't be an issue by completion. kikstart.eu/pixel-ball-pc goes to the website.



FLASH BOREDOM

Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on **Retro Gamer**'s Flash game of the month. This month we take a look at **Super Tory Boy**.

A ONE-BUTTON ACTION GAME WITH A LITTLE POLITICAL HUMOUR; TELL A SENIOR TORY ON THE ROAD TO WESTMINSTER WHEN TO JUMP SO THAT HE COLLECTS BROWN ENVELOPES STUFFED WITH CASH. BONUS MONEY IS AWARDED WHEN PLAYERS DESTROY PUBLIC SERVICES SUCH AS HOSPITALS OR JUMP ON THE HEADS OF THE UNEMPLOYED. KIKSTART.EU/TORY-BOY-FLASH.

MORE GAMES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING. . .



X SEED

» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.KIKSTART.EU/SEED-XBLIG

A remote military research group called SEED working on genetic modification has succeeded in weaponising a range of plant life only to have its experiments break free! The facility is located on a small island that is currently quarantined off, but there is a threat of these mutations reaching the ocean to spread so a clean up operation is ordered and a former SEED researcher sent in.

Weaponry comes in the shape of seeds which, when thrown, immediately take root and blossom in a hail of bullets. As the mutated monster plants are defoliated they leave items behind that power up weapons or add new flora to the arsenal, some of which are needed for the larger, harder to defeat experiments lurking in the laboratories.



GENERIC SPACE SHOOTER

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/GENERIC-XBLIG

Generic Space Shooter is a harrowing morality tale about the dangers of consumerism presented through the medium of modern dance – it just happens to look like a space-bound shoot-'em-up with a multitude of small, fiddly graphics.

The controls are quite tricky; the left thumbstick controls movement but the right switches between launching bullets in the direction of travel or multi-directional firing depending on if the craft is being moved or not. There's an annoying ammo counter for the main weapon so, even if it was possible to run away firing parting shots, the gun would soon empty.

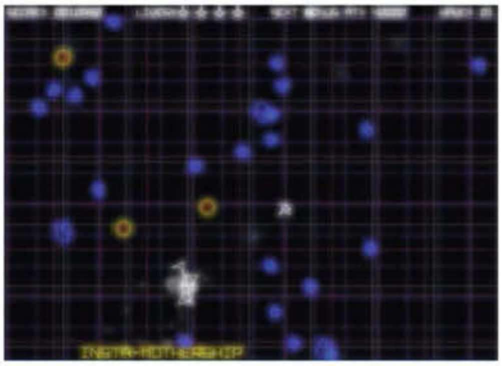
Even at 69p this should probably be passed over, there's already a massive range of indie twin-stick shooters that handle things far better.



SPACE RAWKS

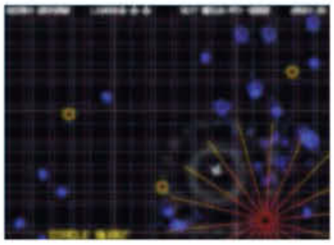
» **DOWNLOAD: WWW.KIKSTART.EU/SPACE-RAWKS-PC**

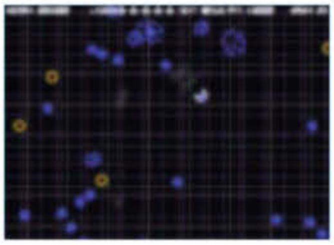
The inspiration for Søren Borgquist's *Space Rawks* is Atari coin-op *Asteroids Deluxe*. The player takes command of a spaceship in the middle of an asteroid field and in order to progress through the levels they must pulverise every spinning rock in sight, splitting them into ever-smaller chunks until the smallest are reduced to dust. The ship can be rotated clockwise or anti-clockwise, fire in whichever direction it's currently pointing or the shields can be activated in an emergency to prevent it being destroyed.



Occasionally a flying saucer or a mothership constructed from half a dozen triangular attack ships will appear to make things more difficult and there are also power-ups appearing in the playfield that have a range of functions, not all of which are helpful to the player. There are a couple of items which temporarily boost the craft's weapons to make the asteroid smashing easier and others which spawn more asteroids and call up flying saucers or motherships.

Space Rawks takes the formula of the game that inspired it and adds extra bells and whistles, but not in a way that breaks what made the original work so well. It plays very solidly and looks the part too.





HOMEBREW HEROES

LAST ISSUE WE HAD A BLAST OF POWER-UP, THE XBOX LIVE INDIE SCROLLING SHOOT-'EM-UP, AND NOW WE'VE MANAGED TO ENGAGE DEVELOPER MIKE HANSON OF PSYCHOTIC PSOFTWARE FOR SOME DIALOGUE AND A BOSS FIGHT



Q&A

To begin with, where did the inspiration for Power-Up come from?
I've been hobby developing little retro-style games for a while, though with little success. When I decided to make a game for XBLIG, I first wanted to master slick controls and solid, simple collision detection. What better genre for precision than the old school shmup? Drawing on the likes of *R-Type*, *Hellfire* and *Project-X*, I got *Power-Up* underway.

And roughly how long did it take to develop and how many people were involved?
It really was just me. I wrote my first line of code in November 2011 and the game hit XBLIG on 13 September 2013. *Power-Up* took just under two years. I did all the design, code, art, sound, music etc myself in my free time when I was working, followed by a few hours a day when I was looking for my next job. It was far from a full-time project.

How hard is it to write a storyline around a twitch-style action game?
I knew I wanted each level to have its own very unique colour scheme and general feel, so I decided to take the game through five very distinctive locations: deep space – purple, a planet orbit – sky blue, a desert – orange, a city – metallic green and a planet core – red. The story came after that. I made it linear enough to drive the narrative of the game without becoming convoluted… then I made it very skip-able!

In hindsight, are there any things you would have done differently?
Power-Up was a learning journey, intended to help shape the way I do things in future. With regards to changing the process, I can always improve on that for my next project. With game design and features, I can make those improvements if there's ever demand for a sequel. *Power-Up* really represents me giving it my absolute best at that particular time. I've no regrets about that.

Are there any good or indeed bad moments that stand out during the development process behind *Power-Up*?
The lowest point was definitely losing my job. For a moment it looked like I wasn't going to get the software I was saving for and that my little coding hobby would have to end… Then I realised that by crowd funding *Power-Up*, I could turn things around and maybe even make a living from it. That Kickstarter really generated interest in the game, ultimately turning the low point into the high point.

And finally, what can you tell us about your next project?
There's a bit to do first… *Power-Up* for PC is coming later this year, and I've a load of art to do for the mobile versions. That said, I've a couple of ideas lined up for the new year. When I decide which to go with, I'll continue to learn and share my progress via my very prolific Twitter feed (@psypsoft). Why not tune in?



» [Xbox 360] Advanced spaceship construction.



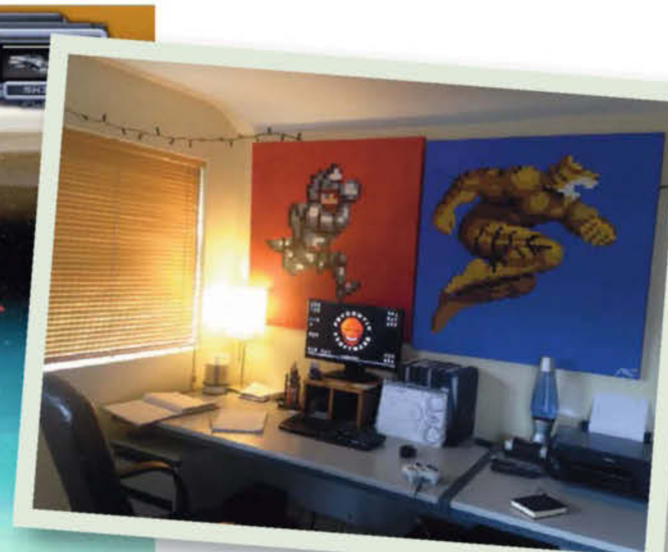
» [Xbox 360] There's not much room to move!



» [Xbox 360] Is your name Martin?



» [Xbox 360] …until I took a laser to the knee.



» Where all of the magic happens.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

WIN!

This month's Star Letter prize is a cool Space Invaders Piggy Bank, courtesy of **www.funstock.co.uk**



STAR LETTER

BACK TO THE NINETIES



» [Arcade] You never forget the first time you played 3D racers like *Ridge Racer*.

Dear **Retro Gamer,**
As a new generation begins I've found myself looking backwards, trying to decide when gaming was at its peak. I have to say looking back I think it was during the Nineties. Granted the late Seventies and early Eighties were incredibly important due to the introduction of so many classic characters, franchises and gameplay mechanics, but the Nineties just felt like a more exciting time.

16-bit computers and consoles were finally beginning to hit their stride, with games ranging from *Super Mario World* and *Pilotwings* on the SNES to *The Secret Of Monkey Island* and *It Came From The Desert*. And let's not forget the importance of 3D. Sure it was encountered during the Eighties (*Driller* etc) but it really became viable during the Nineties, delivering a new way of experiencing games, and helped cement the PC as the cutting-edge games machine it would eventually become. I'll never forget the first time I played *Ridge Racer*, for example.

The creativity on offer in the Nineties was palpable and I don't get that feeling of excitement as we stand on the threshold of a new generation. Sure, everything looks pretty enough, but online integration (something everyone seems to be pushing) simply doesn't interest me. I don't think there will ever be a period in gaming as good as the Nineties were, but I'd love to be proven wrong.
Graham Tucker

The Nineties was a massively important time for gaming, we can't really argue with you there. From the dominance of consoles, to the arrival of exciting new franchises like *Doom* and *WipEout*, it was certainly a great time to be a gamer. Have a prize for getting us all excited about the good old days.

»[C64] Although Manfred Trenz no longer talks, we did chat to him about the original game in Issue 21.



»[Mega Drive] Andy Roan wishes there were more compilations like the *Mega Drive Ultimate Collection*. We agree with him.



SEGA AGES

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I have to compliment your article on compilations (Issue 121). I own close to 24 compilations over various formats but can't help thinking that the games industry underestimates compilations when they could be treated as an important genre of their own. Take for example the *Mega Drive Ultimate Collection* on PS3 and Xbox 360, a game that's screaming out for a sequel. I know that there are licensing issues, but I am sure most of these could be resolved and Sega could release some of the more elusive retro releases alongside the big sellers. I know when these releases are put together the majority of games are chosen quite conservatively so as not to risk making themselves look bad by a game appearing to be of poor quality, but surely anyone that is into retro gaming or wants to get into it either knows that not all games will be great or some have not aged well. It's certainly an important lesson along with learning to decide for yourself what a classic title is.
Andy Roan

You're right Andy, it would be amazing if Sega did a sequel to that compilation, or if more publishers released them in general. Sadly, money is one of the biggest factors, and it gets to a point that if too many developers want too much money than it's hardly worth the publisher's time to create it. That said there's been a dearth of decent collections this generation, with many simply not bothering or doing it in a half-hearted way. Here's hoping more publishers realise the importance of their back catalogues in the next generation.

TURRICAN TALKS

Dear Darran**,**
Please, please, please could you do an article on the *Turrican* franchise? I was a huge fan of the games on the Commodore 64 and adored the Super NES games, so it would be great to get some more insight into the series. They were always technically proficient, so it would be amazing to learn how Factor 5 pulled off all those stunning Mode 7 effects in *Super Turrican 2*.
Yours faithfully,
Mark Johnson

We're big fans of the *Turrican* series as well Mark. Unfortunately, Manfred Trenz, who was an integral part of the franchise, simply doesn't talk to the press any more. We'll try getting hold of other members, but he was crucial for input about the early games.

THE TEN-YEAR ITCH

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
Once in a while I get a little bit complacent with **Retro Gamer**. Sometimes the articles aren't something I'm particularly interested in, or you'll do a feature on something quite obscure, which doesn't quite pique my interest. Every now and then though, something will appear in your magazine that will completely remind me of why I am a lifelong subscriber. This month you ran an in-depth article on the UK publisher English Software – an article which featured a passing mention of their game *Neptune's Daughters*. I played this game as a kid but I couldn't remember what system it was on, who made it or anything else about it and I'd given up trying to figure it out. Then this month – boom – there it is! It was like finally getting to scratch an itch I've had for ten years! And that is why your magazine is so special to me, because it is constantly telling the story of our youth, and if you wait around long enough you just know that your part of the tale will be told. Keep up the good work guys!
Thanks,
Steve Erickson

Glad to hear you enjoyed the article Steve. We've had quite a lot of interest in the English Software article since the



» [Atari 8-bit] Steve has fond memories of *Neptune's Daughter*, he just couldn't remember its name.

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release of 121, so we'll look at covering some of the games in more depth in a later issue.

IMPOSSIBLE SEQUEL

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I'm really looking forward to your upcoming feature on *Impossible Mission*. It was a game that came in one load, a game where the pieces were hidden in different places every time you played and a game that when I eventually did turn off the C64 power pack it was always red hot.

And its sequel? I used to buy both *Zzap!64* and *Commodore User*. *Zzap!* gave it a gold medal, while *Commodore User*'s Gary Penn gave it 7/10. I read both reviews again recently, and I have to say I agreed with Gary. Rooms that you had to die in to get out of, a multiload and the puzzle solving part was nowhere as good as the original. 80 per cent to 85 per cent would have been my score. I'm surprised it has not been attempted on one of the latest formats, although I wonder if they would actually be able to better it…

Anyway keep up the excellent work.

John Ebbs

***Impossible Mission* is a great franchise. Here's hoping System 3 does something to celebrate its 30th anniversary next year.**



» [C64] *Impossible Mission*. Another game where the sequel wasn't as good.

THE ONES THAT GOT AWAY. . .

Darran discusses the covers that didn't quite make it



UNDERDOGS COVER

We wanted to do something a little different for this cover, so Jon came up with the idea of mimicking *The Usual Suspects*. While it was a sound concept the characters clashed together a little too much and there wasn't enough room for effective cover lines.

ALEX KIDD COVER

Sega's forgotten mascot seemed like the perfect choice to head our cover about gaming underdogs. However, he felt like too much of a gamble – he was so closely tied to the success of the Master System that we felt he'd have little impact outside Europe.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Next Gen

The next generation of gaming is merely weeks away as we type this. Steve is aboard Team Sony, while Jon is going to wait for six months to see how it all pans out. Darran's not getting on board until either *Uncharted 4* or *The Last Of Us 2* get released.





From the forum

» www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

Your favourite Cinemaware game?

Gordon Bennett

Wings without a doubt for me. From the tremendously dramatic intro to the diary entries and flying missions it had me glued to my Amiga for hours. And between the experience of playing the game and reading the quite long printed manual of background information on the planes and aviators of the First World War I picked up a bit of an obsession with the subject for a time. I really do miss the days when games shipped with books of background and reference material that wasn't needed to play the game but added tremendously to the immersion and atmosphere.

NES4Life

100% *It Came From The Desert*. I still have memories of unsuccessfully putting out a fire with the hose and waking up in the hospital. Shooting a giant ant in the face also never grows old. Not fast-paced, but it was definitely a gaming moment for me.

Doddsy

I can't single out any particular one that I liked the most, but the standout titles for me were *Wings*, *It Came From The Desert*, *Rocket Ranger* and *Defender Of The Crown*. Four games that made you feel like were playing an interactive movie from the golden era of cinema.

ncf1

Defender Of The Crown. Cinemaware, on the whole though, were ahead of their time, always trying new things, pushing the envelope, and it was always exciting hearing about their next release, to see what they would come up with next. The Rockstar of their day.

Matt_B

I'd go for *It Came From the Desert* too. It captures the air of a Fifties science fiction b-movie pretty much perfectly and it's as much fun to set out with a crazy futile strategy and see how far it gets you as it is to play the game as you're supposed to.

AmigaJay

As an Amiga owner they hold a special place in our gamer hearts, not least for bringing the Amiga platform forward as a gaming platform. Also their games were so well made, not just graphically but story wise, and the attention to detail was a step above anyone else at the time.

As much as I like *Wings* and *Defender Of The Crown*, *It Came From The Desert* has to be my favourite. It just took you into another place whilst playing, while the graphics, sound and atmosphere were all great. (Just don't mention the awful console versions!)

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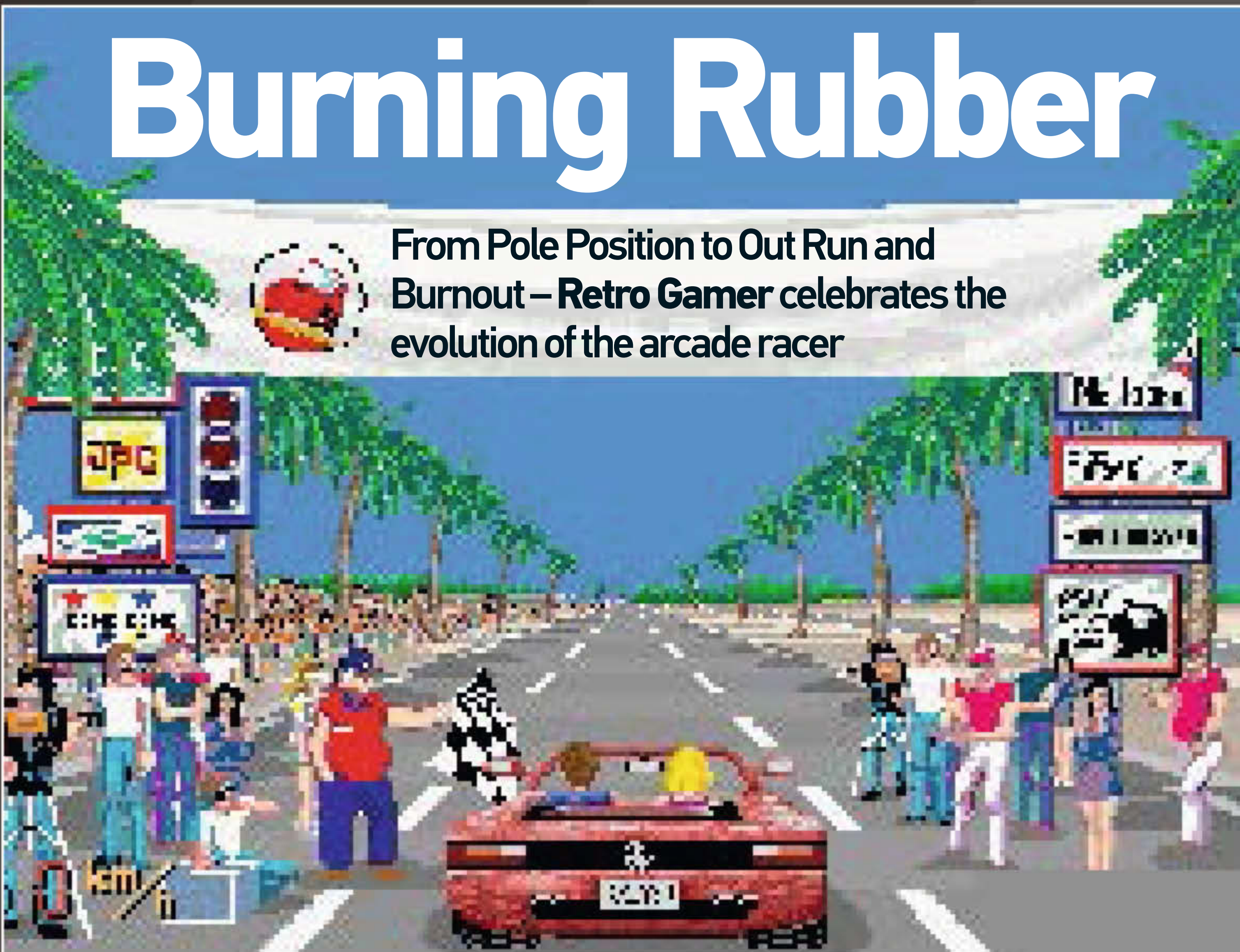
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Burning Rubber

From Pole Position to Out Run and Burnout – **Retro Gamer** celebrates the evolution of the arcade racer



Also featured:



Boulder Dash

■ As Rockford turns 30, we speak to the developers behind the various games that make up *Boulder Dash*'s three-decade legacy



XCOM: Enemy Unknown

■ As the next instalment of the franchise gets released we speak to Julian Gollop about his original strategy hit



Metropolis Street Racer

■ Martyn Chudley recalls the story of the iconic racer and how it helped shape the path of future racing games



Jim Bagley

■ He's worked in the industry for 30 years, recently returning full-circle to make Apple Dash on iOS. Jim tells us how it all happened



Bomb Jack

■ We celebrate *Bomb Jack*'s 30th anniversary with an in-depth look at all its home conversions, from Amstrad to C64


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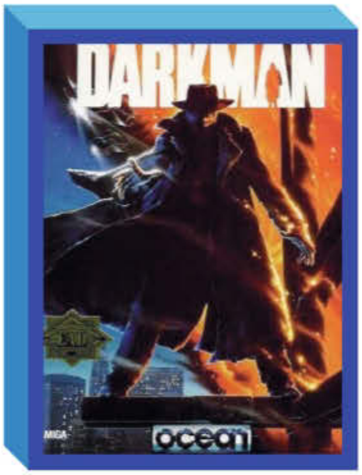

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ENDGAME



DARKMAN

» Ocean Software got hold of a film franchise and surprised everyone by producing a side-scrolling platform beat-'em-up out of it. Darkman was a story penned by director Sam Raimi and the film came about because he failed to get rights to The Shadow or Batman. But no-one was complaining, which is more than can be said for the poor fella in this ending



01

» Darkman is a master of disguise but his attempts to evade notice by creating masks of each level's boss fell short. Whether he wears a mask or not the bad guys still take pot shots at him. Ultimately his mission has succeeded, though.



02

» After working his way through a skyscraper under construction it has come to this: the final flourish in which his dastardly foe is held aloft. Anger on his face, Darkman gets ready to throw him to his death.



03

» The boss, a clone of Darkman himself, looks understandably shocked as he plummets, mouth agape, to the earth. His suddenly enlarged hands won't save him either. This death is coming – but then it has been for a while.



04

» And yes, there it is. Death itself. Spiked by scaffolding poles that someone has carelessly left standing on their ends. Did they not have health and safety rules in 1991? It sure looks pretty graphic on the Amiga.



05

» Darkman looms. His disfigured face is exposed, the mob cartel that has been out to get him have been dispatched and his determination to seek revenge on those who caused him to look like an alien from Area 51 has ended in triumph.


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